



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 56 | ISSUE 01 | JANUARY 2020

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

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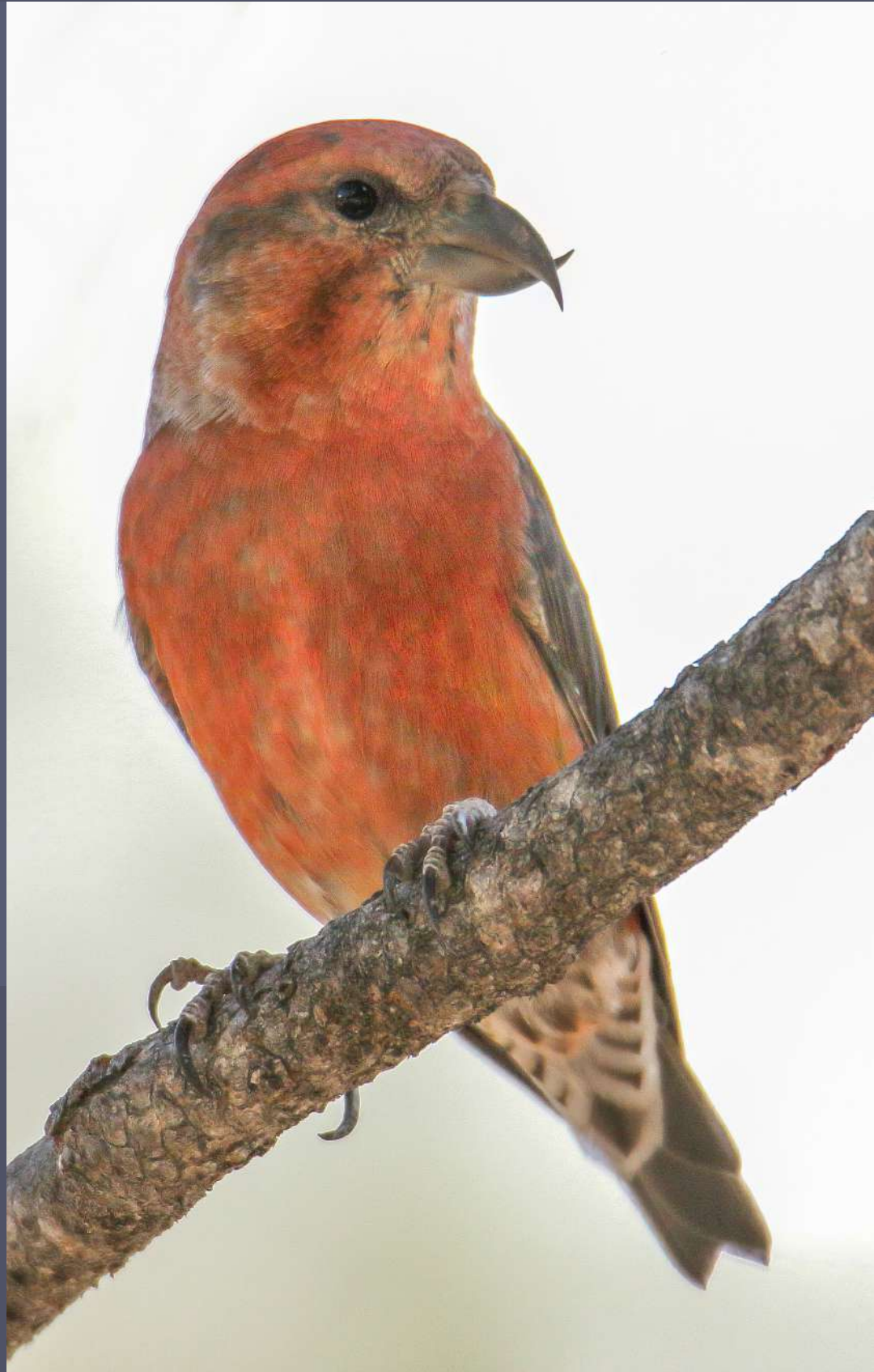
Birding close to home

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Red Crossbill

📷 David Prentice

📍 Rocky Mountain
National Park



Yikes, shrikes!

Leatherman shares tales of killer songbirds

Tim Johnson

On Nov. 25, about 60 people braved an impending winter storm to hear expert Colorado entomologist and birder David Leatherman, who has spent many days touring the barbed-wire fences of eastern Colorado in slow-speed searches for signs of shrike – a hobby he refers to as “shriking.”

In his “I Like Shrikes (and More)” talk and slide show, Leatherman first described the two kinds of shrike found in Colorado. The Loggerhead Shrike nests here in summer and the Northern Shrike is a winter visitor. Some loggerheads overwinter in the Lamar area in the far southeast, as well as in a few extreme western Colorado valleys. While both species impale their prey on barbed wire and the thorns of trees and bushes, Loggerhead Shrikes do it much more frequently.

Leatherman said impaling prey serves at least two functions: caching and holding fresh food still, and attracting mates. Skewering and displaying an abundance and variety of prey could serve the latter purpose of attraction. But Leatherman also has documented a shrike impaling red grasshopper wings without bodies, suggesting that perhaps flashy color can attract mates, too. He suspects impaling could also serve to intimidate territorial intruders or competitors. Impaling is something of an art: ideally, it should immobilize the prey but keep it alive as long as possible for the sake of freshness. Impaling has its mysterious aspects, too. Why, for example, are shrike-killed snakes almost always found without their heads?

The beak of our only predatory songbird is uniquely shaped to function like a wire cutter. The tomia – the cutting edges of a bird’s bill – have a tooth-like structure that fits into a notch, enabling the shrike to efficiently sever its prey’s spinal cord or perform other cutting tasks. Leatherman shared a great many images of insects speared on barbed wire. His extensive background as entomologist enables him to identify insect prey species, which make up the bulk of a shrike’s diet. But the types of insect Leatherman has seen suggest that abundance and opportunism are more important than any preferred species.



Grasshoppers and crickets top the list, but he has found butterflies, spiders and beetles, too, not to mention reptiles and even small birds. The insects include dung beetles and other scarabs, which are largely nocturnal and live under cow pies. Shrikes prey on other nocturnal species as well, from the Many-lined Skink to a type of kangaroo rat. Leatherman isn’t sure how and when shrikes, which are daytime hunters, capture these night crawlers. He’d like to put a motion-activated camera near a beetle-suitable cow pie to try to answer that question.

I was impressed by the amount of biological information, interesting questions and possible research leads Leatherman has teased out of a few thousand tiny carcasses impaled on barbed wire. He recounted instances in which he found new insect species, or new localities for known species, among the impaled. And as for fellow feathered species, Leatherman noted an odd and frequent occurrence: he has found the body and the head of the same bird impaled at opposite ends of a shrike’s territory. “What is the shrike thinking here?” he wondered aloud.

For more of Leatherman’s photos and insights into shrike psychology and habits, watch the video of his Nov. 25 presentation on the [Past Programs](#) page of the DFO website.

Will the Colorado Rare Bird Alert continue in 2020?

By Joe Roller

Do you look at the Colorado Rare Bird Alert (RBA) from time to time? If you find it useful, please consider helping to keep it going. Last December, stalwart compiler Joyce Takamine completed an amazing 13 years assembling the daily Colorado RBA. Eager to continue this service to Colorado birders and visitors, a team of volunteers has continued to post daily updates. Thanks to Allison Hilf, Gregg Goodrich, John Drummond, David Leatherman, Patrick O'Driscoll and Ira Sanders for this service. We are now recruiting more compilers to share the load and keep this vital birding aid going strong.

There are three target audiences for the Colorado RBA:

- Active Colorado birders who want to know where rare birds can be found
- Visiting birders from out of state who want some help finding good birding sites
- "Armchair birders" who enjoy knowing what's around but cannot go afield as much as they used to

Birders in each of these groups have given us positive feedback about the value of the Colorado RBA, but volunteer help is needed to keep it going. Opportunity knocks! Will you sign up to become an RBA compiler, too?

We are looking for birders with enough experience in Colorado to know a rarity from merely uncommon or expected species. Two guides help us with this: the [eBird Colorado Rare Bird Alert](#) and the [Colorado Bird Records Committee's official checklist](#) of the 511 bird species recorded in the state.

The initial time commitment is quite reasonable and provides you with a chance to see if you enjoy the work as much as the rest of us do. We provide a complete "how-to" guide to get you started and an experienced compiler will be right at your side until you get up to speed. Typically, new compilers need only a day or two to get the hang of it. After a one-week trial period, you can sign up for as little as one week each quarter. The time involved varies from less than an hour a day during slow periods to up to two hours during peak migration. Novice compilers are assigned slower weeks to start.

If you use the RBA, please help with the RBA! For more information or to volunteer, contact Joe Roller at jroller9@gmail.com or call him at 303-204-0828.

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for August. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at sharontinianow@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be made to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Have you heard about DFO's "Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals"? Read on

Dave Hill, President

When I asked DFO Vice-President Susan Blansett about a theme for my column this month, she had an immediate reply: "The year ahead and making good on DFO's big, hairy, audacious goals!"

It's only appropriate, as we embark on a new year, that the DFO Board of Directors share with you how much we value our club's members. You are truly the life-blood of our organization, and it is through you that DFO's mission – "To promote interest in the study and preservation of birds and their habitats" – is fulfilled.

DFO's board is pursuing this mission by working to fulfill four ambitious goals that emerged from work at the board's October strategic planning retreat. These goals for the next three years in the life of our club grew out of the results of member surveys in both 2016 and 2018, and we had a great response. 231 members (44 percent) responded with both strong opinions and great ideas. Your participation is vital in developing our Four Big Hairy Audacious Goals. Here they are, with some notes about how we aim to reach them:

Goal #1: "Integrate conservation in everything we do."

- Our recently formed conservation committee is developing a process for taking positions on conservation issues
- The Grants Committee continues to fund scientific research projects that add to our knowledge about bird populations and their preservation
- Field trip leaders brainstormed ways to integrate conservation into field trips in November's Field Trip Leader Forum (see Patrick O'Driscoll's article elsewhere in this issue)

Goal #2: "Attract new members, especially those ages 18-55 and families."

- The newly formed DFO Membership Committee will soon begin work on how to reach out to younger adults and families
- Field trip leaders also addressed this goal at the leader forum,

listing several ideas for bringing more people into birding through field trips that are free and open to the public

Goal #3: "Improve and enhance the quality of the member experience."

- DFO is working to develop monthly programs and Better Birding Workshops that are relevant to our members
- The DFO Field Trip Committee is working to provide necessary leadership skill training to field trip leaders and to expand the diversity of our field trips offerings

Goal #4: "Establish meaningful partnerships with like-minded organizations to further bird conservation and enhance the quality of membership experience."

- The DFO Board is working to improve our long-term partnership with the Denver Museum of Nature & Science
- The board is also seeking other partners in metro Denver that share our goals and are interested in working together towards mutual goals

There you have it: four big, hairy, audacious goals! These will be DFO's focus for the next 3-5 years. Our efforts to accomplish them will create great opportunities for members to engage and volunteer in all sorts of ways that tap into your abilities and your passions.

Achieving our goals will require commitment and skill. But by doing this together, we can revitalize and improve our mission to bring an appreciation of birds and their habitats to new audiences in our community. It is YOU, our fellow members, who have made all of this possible. Thank you!

Field trip leaders brainstorm improvements at annual forum

By Patrick O'Driscoll

About 25 DFO field trip leaders pooled their collective brain power last month on ways to enhance and improve our signature club activity – the more than 100 field outings we lead each year across metro Denver and Colorado.

An exercise to incorporate the goals of DFO's new strategic plan into field trips was the first of several topics Nov. 9 at the annual DFO Field Trip Leaders' Forum in the visitor center at Barr Lake State Park. Forum attendees also learned about helpful web tools for trip leaders, plans to revise leader training, DFO's colonial waterbird citizen science project, website availability of spring and fall bird count data, and DFO's involvement in this year's Denver Christmas Bird Count.

The forum opened with a "facilitated discussion" led by DFO Vice President Susan Blansett about the DFO Board's new three-year strategic plan for the club's development. The group exercise aimed to help define the role of field trips and trip leaders in meeting three of the strategic plan's four main goals, including:

- Integrating conservation into field trips
- Attracting new club members, especially birders ages 18-55 and families
- Enhancing and improving the quality of DFO member experience in field trip offerings, themes and features

Forum participants then worked in three "breakout" groups to generate ideas/answers to questions posed by those goals.

Conservation suggestions ranged from incorporating "Leave-no-Trace" principles and doing club cleanup projects to pre-trip research on conservation issues at trip locations and education about habitat and flora in those places. **Member recruitment** ideas ranged from special trips for families and beginning birders to creating a DFO speakers' bureau and "pop-up" bird observatories to interest local park visitors in birding. **Member experience** improvement ideas ranged from themed trips (bird ID, specific species, etc.) to more new trip destinations and bringing waiting-list participants along on leaders' scouting trips for "sold-out" DFO outings.

DFO trip leader Joey Kellner, who coordinates the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count under the National Audubon Society, spoke to forum-goers about this year's integration of the annual event's

24 suburban area counts into DFO's online registration system. Every one of the Dec. 14 suburban counts was listed as a DFO trip, with DFO trip leaders to co-lead with existing Christmas Count leaders. This allows for easier recruitment, registration and reporting of the results.

In other forum business:

- DFO President Dave Hill, who opened the forum with introductions (including everyone present naming his/her favorite place to bird), also recognized attendee Doris Cruze for having led DFO field trips for more than 30 years.
- Field Trip Committee chair Karen von Saltza encouraged all trip leaders to post a photo and brief profile about themselves on the DFO website to accompany their field trip details on the trip registration page.
- Gregg Goodrich led a familiarization session on web tools, including recording of bird sounds with a smartphone app, eBird checklist best practices, and new trip-management features on the DFO website. He also encouraged trip leaders to review and update website information on the trips they lead.
- Blansett introduced DFO's new voluntary Bring-a-Bag-When-You-Bird Challenge to help tidy up the places where we lead field trips.
- Von Saltza invited feedback on successes and problems on field trips. Topics included concerns that some trip participants may over-use audio bird calls and that such use be kept to a minimum and never in breeding season. The forum also considered the need for formal screening and more training for new trip leaders, and how DFO committees are working to update the Leader Training Manual and the "Better Birding With DFO" guide. There was enthusiasm for more overnight and out-of-state trips after the highly successful, week-long DFO trip to southwestern New Mexico last August. David Suddjian suggested a DFO initiative to lead trips to every county in the state. There were also trip-registration efficiency suggestions to minimize no-shows and late drop-outs from at-capacity trips so that those on waiting lists can fill every slot, every time.

The forum also featured a brainteaser bird ID challenge from trip leader and DFO past-President Chuck Hundertmark, with photos of tricky-to-identify species projected on the meeting room screen. And before the forum convened, Field Trip Committee member Paul Slingsby led an optional bird walk along the Barr Lake trail.

How about you? Interested in becoming a DFO field trip leader? Contact Field Trip Committee Chair Karen von Saltza for more information: kvonsaltza@yahoo.com or 303-941-4881.

Calling all volunteers: DFO committees need new members



Black-capped Chickadee
Jim Esten

By Bea Weaver

Denver Field Ornithologists is expanding its existing committees and forming new ones to provide more and better experiences for members. By volunteering for a DFO committee, you can make new birding friends and play a role in making DFO an even better organization in support of birds and birding. Any level of involvement is welcome. The time commitment is up to you.

INSTAGRAM COORDINATOR

Is social media your thing? Are you well-acquainted with Instagram and how it works? The DFO Communications & Outreach Committee is looking to set up a DFO Instagram presence to share member images and stories – and we can use your expertise. Consider volunteering to help set up and manage our DFO Instagram account. Contact C&O chair Sharon Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The DFO Board has adopted a goal to diversify its membership, while continuing to serve existing members. This committee especially wants to reach birders ages 18 to 55. If figuring out how to attract new members sounds like a fun challenge, this is the committee for you. Contact Nominating Committee Chair Bea Weaver at beamiami@aol.com.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Even a birding club needs business skills to comply with regulations and maintain our solid financial base. The Finance committee oversees DFO's financial reporting and records, works on ideas for fund raising and provides a backup for the Treasurer. If you have skills you are willing to share, contact DFO Treasurer Sue Summers at summerssue@hotmail.com.

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COMMITTEE

Do you have a way with words? Do you enjoy working with websites? How about staffing a booth at a fair or festival? The C&O Committee can use your help with tasks like these and lots more. Communication is essential to achieving our club goals, so consider joining us in this important role. Contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

Applications now open for DFO research, education, conservation grants

By Chris Goulart

DFO's Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund Committee is now accepting grant applications for the coming year. Our club created the Grants Fund to support projects that include study, preservation and learning about birds, especially locally and around our state.

Applicants for project funds can submit their requests online at the [grant application page](#) on the DFO website. **The deadline to apply is Feb. 1, 2020.** Typical Grants Fund awards range from \$500 to \$1,500, but DFO has awarded larger grants in the past.

Each application should include a detailed description of the project and its goals, budgetary needs that the grant would help to fund, and how the project is relevant to protecting Colorado birds and their habitat. DFO gives priority to projects that affect and deal with birds in metro Denver, along Colorado's Front Range, and throughout the state.

DFO established the fund to assist in study, preservation and learning about birds. Past grant awards have helped research into a wide range of topics, including:

- Flammulated Owl nesting success
- Black Swift migratory patterns
- Mountain Plover breeding success strategies
- Bluebird nesting success
- Barn Swallow migration needs

DFO also is seeking project proposals that focus on educational programs and conservation activities.

As the end of the 2019 tax year nears, the fund can also make an excellent charitable contribution. Consider donating to your DFO Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund. Your contributions directly assist efforts to protect, preserve and better understand the birds of Colorado.

For more information about making Grants Fund donations, visit the [Donations page](#) of the DFO website. Thank you!

Welcome to new DFO members:

Jeannette Auman, Englewood; Debbie Behnfield, Lakewood; Andrea Cahoon, Denver; Carol Coe, Greenwood Village; Barbara Jean Gard, Evergreen; Cheryl Siefert, Golden; Peter Stumpp and Donna Stumpp, Westminster; Giselle Youngblood, Denver

Thank you for your contribution to the Research, Education, and Conservation Grant Fund:

Mark Amershek, Jeannette Auman, Robert Beck, Mark Peyton and Susan Blansett, Robert Trout and Jill Boice, Carol Cochran, Carol Coe, John and Peggy Gonder, Julia Gwinn, David Hill, Robert Righter, Pixie H Wigfall and Melissa Smith, Mary Ann Tavery, Jerry and Sharon Tinianow

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

By Sharon Tinianow

Birding with a group of people who know more than I do is a great way to increase my knowledge and skills in the field. And, birding adventures that range all around Colorado, the US and the globe are exciting and fun. But I find birding on my own and close to home to be uniquely satisfying. Whether I am heading out to the backyard to see who is foraging in the garden or to the garage for an excursion by bike or car to a nearby natural area, I grab my binoculars and am equipped for whatever and whoever I encounter.

The spot where I engage in my favorite pastime most frequently is the park a short walk from home. Every morning I walk my dog in Washington Park. For Fiona, the park is her territory, which she marks diligently and monitors through all of her senses. For me, the park is my daily dose of nature that offers an ornithological experience that is both constant and ever-changing.

For an urban setting, Washington Park supports a surprising diversity of bird life. This is most likely due to the presence of three bodies of water in 155 acres of mature trees, shrubs, and herbaceous planted areas. While the park is extremely crowded on fair weather weekends and summer evenings, mornings are a peaceful time of day throughout the year. On a chilly December morning, I might encounter only one or two other walkers. We recognize each other (and each other's dogs), which is just about all the social interaction I need on a typical morning before breakfast.

As for bird life, fall migration through the winter is a great time to learn waterfowl identification. Grasmere Lake, on the south end of the park, is so small that you don't need a scope to see the divers and dabblers clearly. An aerator ensures some open water most of the winter. Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes and Ring-necked Ducks arrive in groups as the weather cools. Rafts of Northern Shovelers perform their circular feeding dance.

Mixed flocks of Canada and Cackling Geese are there, of course, with the occasional surprise of a Snow Goose or a hybrid goose. Mallards, American Widgeons and Gadwalls form the bulk of the dabblers. Nearly every winter, a mature Bald Eagle shows up for a few days.

As the seasons change, so do the birds. Yellow-rumped Warblers (aka "butter butts") are ubiquitous in spring. The arrival of White Pelicans is a special moment. When the first Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night Herons and Double-crested Cormorants show up I know it is truly spring. I can look forward to watching nesting, fledging and raising of young of many species through the summer. At least three kinds of swallows arrive when the hordes of insects appear. Their swooping flights are a joy to watch.

Fall is a time for many surprises. I listen for the high-pitched mewing of Cedar Waxwings, who descend on the trees and shrubs bearing fruit. The occasional Townsend's Solitaire passes through as well, and this past fall several electric-blue Mountain Bluebirds appeared for a few days.

The year-round residents, like crows, Northern Flickers, House Finches and Black-capped Chickadees, are hard to miss and always interesting to watch. More elusive birds like Brown Creepers can be found, too, if you take the time to circle the whole park and visit the different planted areas.

Knowing a place in all seasons through frequent visits is something I highly recommend. It is not so much about listing, although it can be. For me, the daily birding outing in Washington Park provides me with a sense of belonging to a community of more-than-human species. That's because the birds are not the only species I notice. I see the progression of plant and insect life, too. This fall I watched a snapping turtle make its way along the dry bottom of Smith's ditch. My dog is alert to the arrival of crayfish when the ditch fills with water in the summer. We both revel in the delights of our neighborhood park.

I know I am not the only one who has adopted a local birding spot. If you have one, please share! Future issues of *The Lark Bunting* will feature stories from members about the places they come back to again and again. If you have one, send it to me at sharontinianow@gmail.com.



Cackling and Canada Geese
in Washington Park
Jim Esten



Ross Goose in
Washington Park
Jim Esten

JANUARY FIELD TRIPS

Register for DFO field trips on the [website](#) or contact the leader directly. Bring your own binoculars, water, snacks and/or lunch, insect repellent, and sunscreen. Dress for the weather. Directions and detailed descriptions of each trip can be found on the website. February field trips will appear on the website on January 1. Please be considerate and delete your reservation if you are unable to attend a trip for which you have registered.

Denver City Park (Denver County)

Sunday, January 5

7:30 AM - 11:30 AM

Patrick O'Driscoll

Email: patodrisk@gmail.com

Phone: 303-885-6955

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Winter in City Park usually means lots of geese, with the chance for unusual and rare ones. A winter Bald Eagle appearance is also a possibility. The park has winter sparrows and songbirds, plus an array of year-rounders from flickers to magpies. Expect to walk about 3 miles on park paths, sidewalks and grass meadows. A scope might be helpful.

Southwestern Metro Area

Tuesday, January 7

7:30 AM - 12:00 PM

David Suddjian

Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 12

Specific birding spots will be selected day of the trip based on where there might be open water, what is around, and weather. We will seek a variety

of species, probably involving some walking at some sites, maybe on snowy paths. Bring a scope if you have one.

South Platte River Trail at E 88th Ave and I-76

Saturday, January 11

8:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Mark Amershek

Email: mamershek@msn.com

Phone: 303-329-8646

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 15

We will see lots of ducks, a few raptors, and some hardy winter residents. Hike along paved trail and occasionally in the adjacent mud for up to 3 miles.

First Creek at Denver Open Space

Sunday, January 12

7:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Patrick O'Driscoll

Email: patodrisk@gmail.com

Phone: 303-885-6955

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Winter visits to First Creek almost always include a few waterfowl joining the usual crew of year-round birds and winter visitors. Time permitting, we'll also do the First Creek Trail in Rocky Mountain Arsenal across Buckley Road from the First Creek @ DEN trail. Expect to walk 4-5 miles on level trail and paved path. NOTE: no restrooms at this location.

Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe County)

Saturday, January 18

7:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg

Email: egseagle171@aol.com

Phone: 303-478-4641

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Look for gulls, waterfowl, and a variety of birds. Habitats include deep water, marshlands, mixed grasses, and cottonwoods. We will carpool to the various stops and walk 1-2 miles. Scopes are useful.

Chatfield State Park (Marina sandpit)

Monday, January 20

7:30 AM - 11:30 AM

Gregg Goodrich

Email: GreggGoodrich@gmail.com

Phone: 303-655-9135

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Maximum Participants: 12

We will scope the sandspit and Plum Creek from the sandspit. Hope for winter water birds. Also scope from the Heron Overlook and go to South Platte Reservoir if there are good winter birds being seen.

Park County Explorations

Tuesday, January 21

7:00 AM - 3:00 PM

David Suddjian

Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 8

This trip will search for Rosy-Finches at Park's mountain towns, as well as other winter mountain birds. Minimal walking, but maybe some long drives between spots, and we may elect to visit Victor in Teller on our Rosy hunt. Bring lunch.

Joder Ranch

Saturday, January 25

8:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Chuck Hundertmark

Email: chundertmark8@gmail.com

Phone: 303-604-0531

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 10

This is a moderate to difficult half-day hike of 2 miles each direction (4 miles total). There may be snow or ice on trail so boots are recommended and trekking poles may be useful. Expect a variety of foothills winter birds.

Stearns Lake

Sunday, January 26

8:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Laura Steadman

Email: lauramsteadman@gmail.com

Phone: 8433195086)

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Maximum Participants: 12

This Boulder County lake is in a large open space with agricultural fields, cottonwood stands, and a nearby eagle's nest. We'll walk along a flat, gravel trail to observe waterfowl, raptors, bald eagles, and other wintering feathered friends. Plan to walk a couple of miles.

South Platte Park

Monday, January 27

7:30 AM - 12:00 PM

David Suddjian

Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

We will check South Platte Reservoir for interesting waterbirds and explore the river corridor and maybe other spots in the park. This should be a great opportunity to study ducks and a dipper has been around in recent winters. Be ready to walk on snowy paths for a few miles. We may drive to another nearby location to end the trip.

South Platte Park

Tuesday, January 28

2:30 PM - 5:45 PM

David Suddjian

Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

This late afternoon-to-sunset trip will focus on South Platte Park Reservoir and nearby areas. Interesting gulls, ducks, geese, swans, or loons may be around. We may walk about 2 miles, maybe on snowy paths. It will be cold up near the reservoir, even if a nice afternoon, so layers are recommended. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.



Tree Swallow
Jim Esten

Sign up for the Christmas Bird Count **December 14**

See the Field Trip
page of the website
for details.

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email (legible) _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Looking at 2020 with
20/20 Vision

UPCOMING PROGRAM

The History and Future
of Waterfowl Conservation
in Colorado

SUPPORT DFO

Books, books . . .
More Books!

FEATURED ARTICLE

Birding Close to Home:
Love Letter to Denver
City Park

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

American Kestrel

📷 Jim Esten
📍 Littleton, Colorado



MONTHLY PROGRAM



The History and Future of Waterfowl Conservation in Colorado

Monday, January 27
Matt Reddy

Denver Field Ornithologists' monthly evening program series resumes in January after the holiday break with guest speaker Matt Reddy, regional biologist for Ducks Unlimited (DU). Reddy, a University of Northern Colorado graduate, has worked for DU for 25 years, mainly on projects of land acquisition and habitat improvement in Colorado and Wyoming.

Ducks Unlimited is dedicated to the conservation of wetlands and associated upland habitats for waterfowl, other wildlife, and people. It has about 700,000 members, mostly in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Since its founding in 1937, DU has completed more than 20,000 projects, conserving more than 14 million acres of land.

Matt will discuss his work across the region, including DU's Heartland and Heritage Initiative. Conservation work under this initiative focuses on continentally significant migration habitat along the Platte River system in Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming, in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin, and on publicly managed wetlands in Kansas.

"Because it bisects both the Central and Mississippi flyways, the Platte is very important to the migration of waterfowl," Reddy once told *The Denver Post* in an interview. "Our goal is to conserve shallow wetlands that can be flooded during spring and fall migration."

7 PM | Free and open to the public
Unity Spiritual Center of Denver
3021 S. University Blvd.
Denver, Colorado

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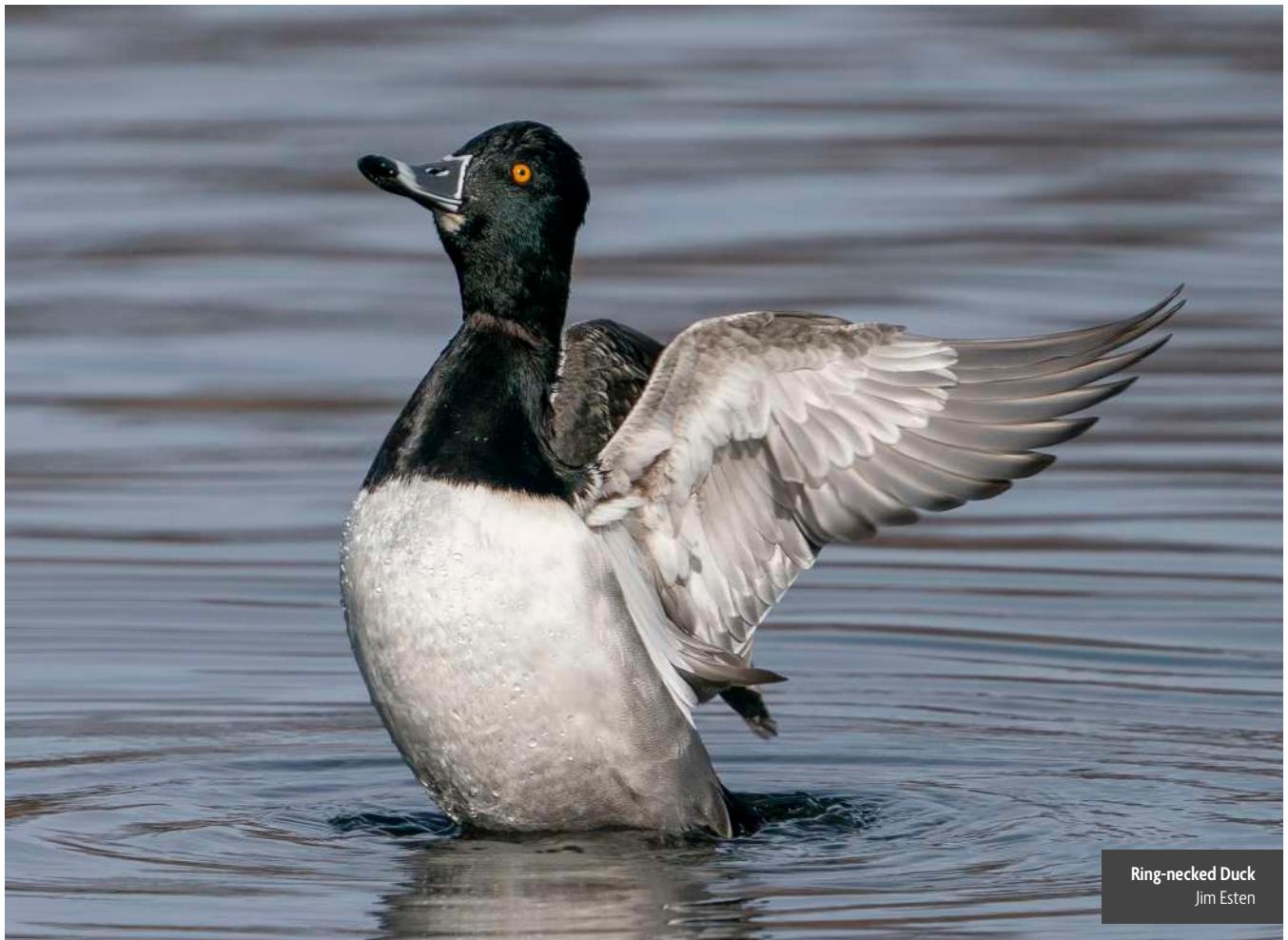
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Ring-necked Duck
Jim Esten



Northern Pintail
Jim Esten

BOOKS, BOOKS . . . MORE BOOKS!

Mary Cay Burger

From time to time, Denver Field Ornithologists receives contributions of bird and wildlife-related books from members, former members and other friends of DFO. For a modest and voluntary donation of your own choosing, DFO makes them available to you and all members.

Our collection of printed avian miscellanea is ever-changing, but at any time it includes wonderful books about birds both foreign and domestic – reference works, histories, birding guides, picture books, and location-specific volumes about where to go birding and what you may find there. We display these second-hand treasures in the vestibule outside the meeting hall at every monthly evening program, as we will for the one scheduled on Jan. 27.

DFO charges nothing for these books. We ask only that you consider a donation to DFO for what you might pay for such volumes if they were offered at a garage or yard sale.

All contributed funds for these books are added to the DFO Grants Fund to support bird-related research, conservation and education projects in Colorado.



Welcome to new DFO members

Ira Baline, Englewood; Tom Booth, Littleton; Marie Boylan, Aurora; Scott Caruso, Lakewood; Nancy Donovan, Highlands Ranch; Ruth Gabreski, Centennial; Joseph Margoshes, Denver; Senja and Mark Meiklejohn, Littleton; Kate and Kyle Sandersen, Denver; Michelle Stringer and Brian Stringer, Wheat Ridge; Sally Waterhouse, Nathrop; Julie Zahniser, Boulder

Thank you for your contribution to the Research, Education, and Conservation Grant Fund

Christie Owens in memory of Richard Mendez
Mary Beverly
R. Dale Brown
Dale Campau
Linda and C. Raymond Clark,
Colin Deihl and Dina Clark
Jean and Charlie Curlee
Mary and Dave Driscoll
Laurie Duke
Kristine Haglund
J.B. Hayes
Jan and Doug Hodous
Marjorie Jannotta and Chuck Hundertmark
Roger Koester
Kristina Koff
Judy Lane
Linda MacIntyre
Senja and Mark Meiklejohn
Greg Mihalik
Jim Petri
Tom Parchman
Pat and Barney Poole
Ben, Soren, and Orion Dinsmore and Tracy Rackauskas
Polly Reetz
Kate and Kyle Sandersen
Lynne Scholfield
Paul Slingsby
Sondra Bland and Bob Spencer
Peter Stoltz
Karen Strong
Sue Summers
Ronald Villiotti
Jan Justice Waddington
Ken Wat
Laura and Wayne Wathen
Karen and John Weslar
Robyn and Jeremy Winick
Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele
Scott Yarberry
Mary Zick



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Looking at 2020 with 20/20 Vision

Dave Hill, President

Another wonderful year is now underway for you with Denver Field Ornithologists!

Our signature guided birding trips will not only continue, they will expand to include new opportunities for families and young adults. Efforts have begun to revise field trip leader training, which will make our avian explorations better than ever as they stretch to the outer reaches of the Denver metropolitan area – and beyond.

Two things atop our planning list for 2020 are to integrate conservation into everything we do and to rekindle our partnership with the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. This is DFO in action. Watch, participate, learn and appreciate!

As members, you are part of a marvelous, first-class organization of generous and involved birders. DFO is where you meet like-minded individuals – whether your motivation is to find, identify and record bird species on our unparalleled field trips, or to learn new skills to better appreciate, track and account for birds, from eBird expertise to Better Birding workshops. It's a cliché to say it, but DFO really *does* have something for everyone: monthly evening programs, *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, volunteer opportunities and more.

And yes: We do all of it with volunteers – I call them DFO's superpower! They allow us to keep the cost of membership reasonable, and our programs and outings free and open to all so non-members can test-drive DFO before joining. It also allows every one of us to invest in our passion in small but meaningful ways. As far as I know, this kind of opportunity in the birding world exists virtually nowhere else on the planet. So come on: Climb aboard the DFO bandwagon! Be bird social, invite your friends – seats ARE available!

If you have been a DFO member awhile, perhaps you're ready to get involved beyond a field trip or an evening program. I encourage you to [fill out the volunteer form](http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx) on the DFO website (<http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx>). In giving a little of your time to volunteer work for DFO, you may find yourself growing in ways you hadn't thought possible. Our mutual interest in birds and birding connects us all in so many ways.

With 20/20 vision, we look forward to the year 2020. Let's all strive to provide the best birding experience possible both to our members and our communities – to do everything we can to protect the birds we enjoy so much.

Happy New Year, and welcome to all in 2020!



BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

Love Letter to Denver City Park

Patrick O'Driscoll

My eBird tells me I have birded 200 times within your urban boundaries – but those are just the times when I uploaded a list. I live about a mile east of you, and my companion Patricia lives three blocks west of you. So we had already strolled through your century-old groves and around your lakes almost every weekend for more than 5 years – half-consciously admiring your many wild things with wings – before I first wrote down and filed what I saw.

I think that day – Sunday, April 21, 2013 – was when I really became a birder, thanks to you. In a way, you fledged me, like one of the cormorants at your Duck Lake nursery. You may not be my birthplace, Denver City Park, but you are my home patch.

Humans were probably saying “Familiarity breeds contempt” long before the medieval poet Chaucer first wrote down that phrase in 1386. But for me and Denver’s own kinda-sorta Central Park, it’s the opposite. I still get a thrill every time I set foot in Denver City Park.

If it’s early February, will the first returning Double-crested Cormorant be parading around Duck Lake, his breeding

plumage “crests” flying? If spring, will the Black-crowned Night-Herons and Snowy Egrets be nesting at Ferril Lake? Come summer, will there be a coyote for the Black-billed Magpies to mob as it lolls on the museum lawn? If early fall, will I catch a pulse of Wilson’s Warblers or a stray Western Kingbird or Hermit Thrush stopping in en route south? And if it’s winter, will a Snow or Greater White-fronted Goose stand out among the thousands of Cackling and Canada Geese? Or will red foxes cross the ice onto the island in Ferril Lake to get a better crack at a goose dinner, as I’ve seen them try twice in the past 4 Decembers?

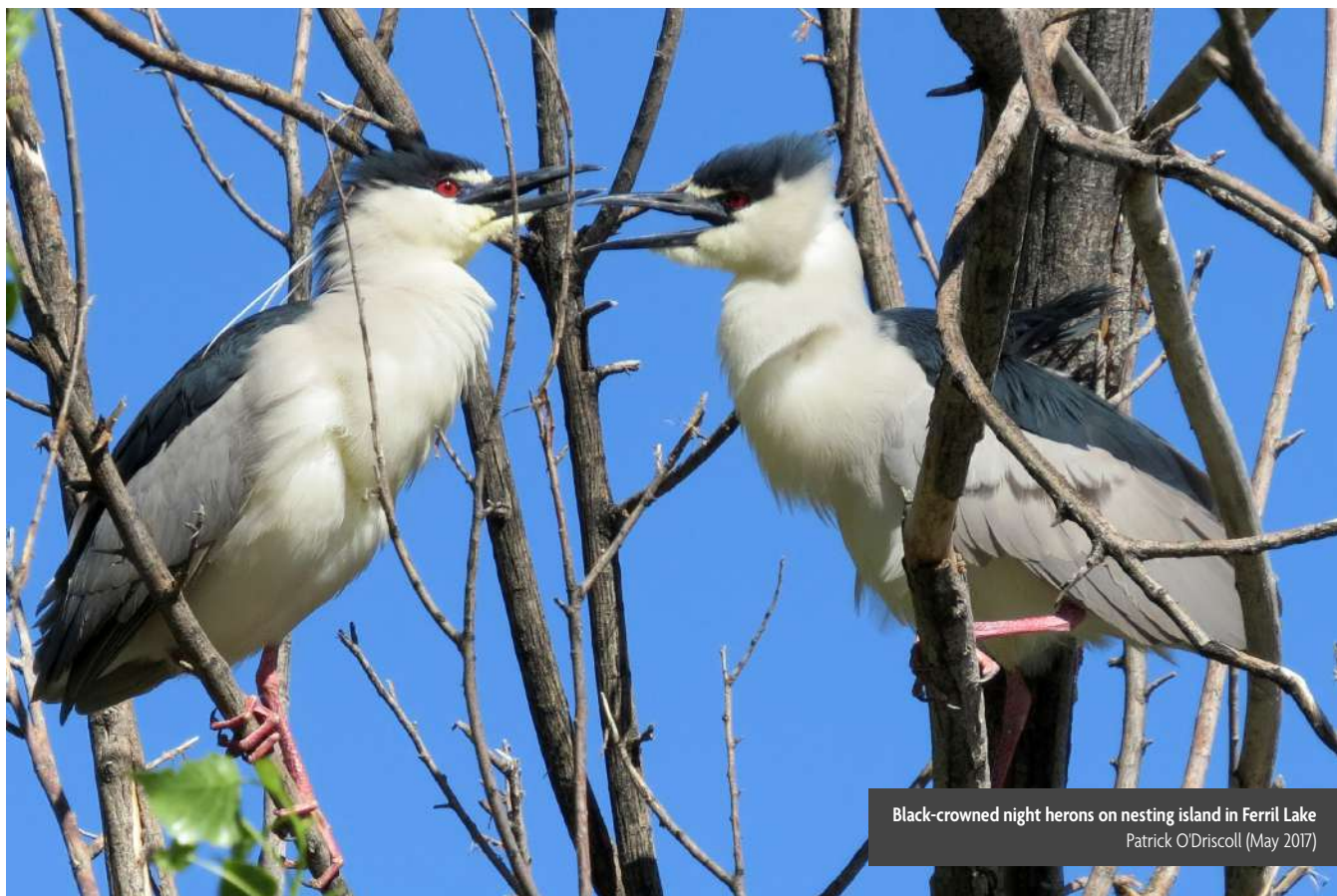
According to eBird, 174 avian species have been recorded in this unlikely wildlife refuge in the heart of the city. I have been lucky to see 125 of them. So never mind the background urban bustle and hum . . . or the every-spring/summer/fall-weekend charity runs, festivals, and concerts . . . or even the can’t-find-a-place-to-park scrum when crowds overflow at the Museum of Nature & Science and Denver Zoo. I’m happy to share the park with all of them, because in spite of it all, the birds of Denver City Park keep returning.

Or, sometimes, they don’t leave, even when they should. Defying death by winter cold their species cannot long endure, four young Double-crested Cormorants – hatched and fledged last summer on the Duck Lake nesting island – were somehow still there this New Year’s Day. It was the species’ first record in the park in January, save for a high, passing flyover last year by a lone bird.

I say it whenever I lead a DFO field trip there: City Park always seems to surprise. Three Aprils ago, it was the park’s first-record Red-naped Sapsucker, drilling sap wells in a pine tree. Three Decembers ago, it was a Common Redpoll. Almost every visit, something delights – even if it’s just a rare meet-up between the park’s two enormous Graylag/Swan Goose domestic hybrids, longtime year-round residents who seem to hang with their own cliques of resident Canada Geese. I still marvel that City Park supports one of the largest cormorant colonies in the state. The loud, crazy summer scene on Duck Lake’s island has more than 200 nesting pairs and hundreds more offspring at its peak.

I came late to birding, first paying casual attention in my late 40s. But after reading Chuck Hundertmark’s CO-Birds email account of a City Park field trip on April 20, 2013, I couldn’t wait to go out the next day with his list as my guide. “My

Continued on page 7



Black-crowned night herons on nesting island in Ferril Lake
Patrick O'Driscoll (May 2017)

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME *continued from page 6*

best birding day ever!" I gushed later into my page-a-day journal. "Twenty-eight species, about 10 of them new to my life list, modest though it may be . . . Yeah!" Below my scribble, I even listed them all, from avocets to woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy and Northern Flicker).

Inevitably, upon training to become a DFO field trip leader 3 years later, where else would I lead my first outing but in my backyard patch? And those colonial waterbirds were so charismatic, I couldn't help volunteering for DFO's citizen science project to study the breeding colonies of cormorants, herons and egrets there and in other metro Denver parks.

As much as I enjoy showing off Denver's oldest park to others, give me a morning alone in City Park with binoculars and camera any day. I'll wander happily from the park's oldest groves (west of the tennis courts) to the shores of Duck and Ferril Lake to the "pinetum" ("pine-E-tum," the wonderfully archaic name for an arboretum of conifers) beneath the south wall of the museum. For these places and the many birds they harbor within you, thank you, Denver City Park.

.....

Have you adopted a local birding spot that has become your own "home patch"? Please share! Future issues of The Lark Bunting will feature DFO member stories about the places they come back to again and again. If you have one, send it to Sharon Tinianow, editor of The Lark Bunting, at sharontinianow@gmail.com

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS

Register for DFO field trips on the [website](#) or contact the leader directly. Dress for the weather. Directions and detailed descriptions of each trip can be found on the website. March field trips will appear on the website on February 1. Please be considerate and delete your reservation if you are unable to attend a trip for which you have registered.

Aurora Reservoir and Cherry Creek State Park

Monday, February 3
7:00 AM - 12:00 PM

David Suddjian
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com
Phone: 831-713-8659
Trail Difficulty: Moderate
Maximum Participants: 12

We'll seek interesting geese, gulls, ducks and other waterbirds, as well as raptors and whatever we can find! Be ready for some discussion of gull ID, if they present themselves well for us. Bring a scope, if you have one. We may walk up to a couple miles at each location.

South Platte River Trail at E 88th Ave and I-76 **Saturday, February 8**

8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Mark Amershek
Email: mammershek@msn.com
Phone: 303-329-8646
Trail Difficulty: Easy
Maximum Participants: 16

We will see lots of ducks, a few raptors, and some hardy winter residents. Hike along paved trail and occasionally in the adjacent mud for up to 3 miles.

Cherry Creek SP Wetlands Loop (Arapahoe County)

Sunday, February 9

9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Patrick O'Driscoll
Email: patodrisk@gmail.com
Phone: 303-885-6955
Trail Difficulty: Moderate

For DFO's 85th anniversary year, we are reviving this monthly half-day of walking -- led for several years by Karen von Saltza -- through most of the important habitats in Cherry Creek State Park, Denver's "backyard." With a year-round progression of species and seasons, this will be an ideal monthly trip both for beginners and for veteran birders. Come, learn, enjoy! Be aware that in winter trails can be slippery or muddy. Expect to walk about 3 miles along level paths. Bring your friends!

Southeastern Colorado **Tuesday, February 11**

5:00 AM - 6:00 PM

David Suddjian
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com
Phone: 831-713-8659
Trail Difficulty: Strenuous
Maximum Participants: 8

This trip is planned to focus on Otero and Crowley Counties, but this could change to include other adjacent counties. We will seek interesting raptors along back roads, check out cemeteries and state wildlife areas, ponds and feed lots, and see what we can learn about the winter avifauna in these areas. Good for county birding. Expect some long drives down and back.

South Platte River at West Florida Avenue **Saturday, February 15**

7:00 AM - 12:00 PM
John Breitsch
Email: jbreitsch@hotmail.com
Phone: 303-588-0552
Trail Difficulty: Easy

We will walk along the Platte River Trail covering two or three eBird hotspots along the way. The trail is level but can be icy.

Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat/Sawhill (Boulder County)

Sunday, February 16

9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Laura Steadman
Email: lauramsteadman@gmail.com
Phone: 843-319-5086
Trail Difficulty: Easy
Maximum Participants: 10

The trip will involve walking 2-3 miles on level ground. We will look for waterfowl at the lakes at Walden and Sawhill Open Space areas if they're not frozen over. We will also look for the resident great-horned owls and hawks. At 75th St and Boulder Creek, we'll look for dippers.

Southeastern Colorado **Monday, February 17** **5:00 AM - 6:00 PM**

David Suddjian
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com
Phone: 831-713-8659
Trail Difficulty: Strenuous
Maximum Participants: 8

This trip is planned to visit Cheyenne County, seeking to explore the wide-open prairie of this under-birded county. We will hope for interesting raptors, maybe in good numbers, and hopefully flocks of Lapland Longspurs. But every species is a prize in this challenging county, and we will visit some towns and tree groves as we find them. We may also bird Lincoln County. Good for County Birding. The day will involve long drives. Restroom portals limited.

Longmont Area Birding

Sunday, February 23

8:00 AM - 1:30 PM

Christie Owens

Email: christieowens2@icloud.com

Phone: 970-481-7271

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Maximum Participants: 12

Bring lunch and dress for the weather including shoes for sloshing through mud. Bring a scope if you have one. Also bring charged two-way radios if you have one or more. We will drive to various Longmont area lakes and ponds to search for any early arrivals as well as any residents. In addition, we will driving by fields and pastures searching for any raptors, sparrows, etc. We may walk a little more than 2 miles on level, mostly graveled trails.

Park County Explorations

Monday, February 24

5:00 AM - 4:00 PM

David Suddjian

Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 8

This trip will visit forests, creeks, lakes and open areas of beautiful southern Park County (and Teller, too), and hopefully early enough to give a try for Pygmy-Owl. We are sure to see interesting things. A run for Rosy Finches at Victor is possible. Good for County Birding. Bring lunch. Restrooms limited.

Dawson Butte Ranch Open Space (Douglas County)

Saturday, February 29

7:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Chris Gilbert

Email: chrisgee9@gmail.com

Phone: 804-214-1508

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

As we get close, we will know what kind of hike we will have. About a 5-mile hike with potential for all the front-range birds. Lunch is optional; there are picnic tables in the area.



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email (legible) _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 56 | ISSUE 03 | MARCH 2020

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

National Bird-Feeding
Month . . . and a nestful
of DFO news

UPCOMING PROGRAM

Wild Patagonia with
Anyll Markevich

PROGRAM REVIEW

Birds of a feather:
Ducks Unlimited's Colorado
work benefits birders, too

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

Sand Creek/Westerly
Creek @ Stapleton

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Brant

📷 Bob Shade

📍 Lake Arbor, Arvada, CO





Wild Patagonia

Monday, February 24
Anyll Markevich

Join Anyll Markevich to discover Patagonia, Chile through photos and stories at the Denver Field Ornithologists February program. While spending 4-1/2 months with his family in the region at the southernmost tip of South America, Markevich had close-up encounters with penguins and did four days of backpacking in Torres del Paine National Park. The park is known for its soaring mountains, bright blue icebergs that cleave from glaciers, and golden pampas (grasslands) that shelter rare wildlife such as the llama-like guanaco.

Along the way, he learned about the efforts of people who are protecting these beautiful places for generations to come. They include the Tompkins Foundation, a family of organizations established by entrepreneurs-turned-conservationists Kristine and Douglas Tompkins to establish new protected areas, help recover imperiled species, and promote healthy communities. One of the foundation's projects is *Parque Patagonia*, an area that features the greatest terrestrial biodiversity in the Chacabuco Valley region of Chile. Whether you are a wildlife watcher, a hiker or an environmentalist, you will enjoy this program, set for 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 24 at Unity Denver.

Anyll Markevich, age 16, is a home-schooled high school student and passionate naturalist, environmentalist, and photographer. Through his photography, Anyll aims to share the hidden beauty of nature. He learned to appreciate birds as an active member of Boulder County Audubon Teen Naturalists.

Markevich is working toward a career in wildlife biology with a focus on animal communication. His current projects include educating the public about wolves as part of the Rocky Mountain Wolf Project, gathering data to inform conservation approaches, and organizing local community weed control efforts.

Upcoming programs this spring:

March 23: "Falcons: Streamlined for Speed" with Perry Conway

April 27: "Homogenization of Colorado Nesting Bird Populations" with Steve Jones

7 PM | Free and open to the public
Unity Spiritual Center of Denver
3021 S. University Blvd.
Denver, Colorado

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24,065 birds, 101 species: With DFO help, 2019 Denver Christmas Count's in the books

Joey Kellner

On Dec. 14, DFO and its members helped lead the 2019 Audubon Denver Christmas Bird Count, the 66th annual effort since 1954 inside the same 15-mile diameter count circle over the southwest Denver suburbs and foothills.

The 2019 effort marked a year of two important firsts:

- Participant registration and count area management with the help of the Denver Field Ornithologists online field-trip registration system, and
- Collection and compilation of species and bird numbers entirely using [eBird](#)

A combined 163 field observers in 24 count areas and 12 watchers at birdfeeders reported a respectable 24,065 individual birds of 101 species in the day-long count. One new species was added to the cumulative Denver CBC this year – a single Least Sandpiper was found and photographed in Area 8 (Chatfield Reservoir). This raised the grand total of species recorded on the count since 1954 to 202.

The weather on count day started relatively calm with cloudy conditions in the foothills and mostly clear at lower elevations within the count circle. Mid-morning snow hit the foothills so that by early afternoon, birding was shut down higher up. About that time, overcast skies with snow and wind arrived at lower elevations in the circle. Morning temperatures started at 18 degrees and rose to 45, but with light or no winds.

The 10 most numerous species in the 2019 count were Canada Goose (5,144), Cackling Goose (3,057), Mallard (1,674), House Finch (1,270), Red-winged Blackbird (1,009), Northern Shoveler (928), American Crow (778), Pygmy Nuthatch (686), Black-billed Magpie (623) and Black-capped Chickadee (818). Together, these top 10 accounted for 65.3 percent of total birds counted. The Pygmy Nuthatch number is a new count record for that species.

“Rare” species on this year’s count – those seen on less than 10 percent of previous counts – included:

- **Trumpeter Swan** – recorded on the Denver CBC for only the second time (the first was in 1995), seen in 2019 at Areas 7B and 8 (Lower South Platte and Chatfield Reservoir)
- **White-winged Scoter** – seventh record in the Denver count, also found in Area 8
- **Eastern Bluebird** – just the fourth sighting in the Denver count, observed in Area 9 (Upper South Platte)
- **Mountain Bluebird** – sixth sighting in the Denver count, also found in Area 9
- **Varied Thrush** – only the second-ever sighting in the Denver CBC, a continuing bird in Area 2 (Lower Bear Creek)

“Uncommon” species on the 2019 count – those seen on 10–24 percent of past Denver CBCs – included Cackling Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Pacific Loon, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Say’s Phoebe, Lesser Goldfinch and Lapland Longspur.

Although Christmas Bird Counts are performed only on single days, species also seen in the count circle within three days before and three days after count day can be added as “Count Week” species. Two such species in 2019 – Greater White-fronted Goose and Tundra Swan – bumped the official overall count to 103 species.

As compiler of the 66th Denver Christmas Bird Count, I thank all of the field observers and feeder watchers for participating. Special thanks go to the area leaders and DFO field trip leaders who assisted this year in collecting and reporting all the data via eBird. We learned a lot in the first go-round with this system, and we will make a few tweaks for the 2020 count. But the leaders all stepped up to make the 2019 count a success.

Continued on page 4

Thank you also to Cheryl Teuton and Dan Brooke for their amazing job once again of coordinating the post-count potluck. Thank you, too, to Bob Shade for contacting, coordinating, and compiling all the CBC feeder watch data. Thanks also to Colorado Parks & Wildlife for use of the Chatfield State Park multipurpose room for our compilation meeting. Lastly, thanks to all who brought food and drinks to the potluck. Sharing food and friendship after a day in the field was a great way to relax before the holidays. I hope to see all of you again at the 2020 count and compilation.

Below are the participants by area number and name, with area leaders' names in **boldface**. As an important footnote, the 175 birder-observers (163 in 44 traveling area parties and 12 watchers at 11 birdfeeders) logged 202 combined hours of observations (154 hours on foot and 48 by car), and traveled 467 total miles (168.3 on foot and 298.7 by car). Feeder counters spent 33.5 hours watching at feeders.

- Area 1 – Red Rocks Park: **Dan Stringer**, Chuck Aid, Tom Casadevall, Michael, Kiessig, Wendy Wibbens
- Area 2 – Lower Bear Creek: **Scott Somershoe**, Rick Creswell, Peggy Gonder, Diane Hutton, George Mayfield, Dale Pate
- Area 2A – Bear Creek Lake Park: **Mary Geder**, Burke Angstman, Dina Baker, Ellie Brown, Karl Brummert, Stephen Hart, Cyndy Johnson, Cynthia Kristensen
- Area 3 – Bow Mar/Marston: **Bill Hopping**, Georgia Hart, Joe Roller, Ira Sanders, Tammy Sanders
- Area 4A – Lower South Platte-east: **Ed Holub**, Nelson Ford, Thomas Holub, Colleen Nunn
- Area 4B – Lower South Platte-west: **Dean Shoup**, Deb Carstensen, Charlene Costain, David Costain, Jeff Dawson, Dick Schottler, David Shafer, Paulo Tabares, Santiago Tabares Erices, Brian Tavernia,, Bruce Warneke, Charlene Warneke, Giselle Youngblood
- Area 5 – Highline Ditch: **Nancy Crews**, Doris Cruze, Pam Schmidt
- Area 6 – Plum Creek: **Norm Erthal**, Dan Brooke, Jesse Casias, Renee Casias, Gerard Giamberdine, Cheryl Teuton
- Area 7A – Middle South Platte: **Charles Lawrence**, Megan Miller, Amanda Spears, Donna Stumpp
- Area 7B – Middle South Platte: **Urling Kingery**, Blake Besser, Frank Coons, Ruth Gabreski, Scott, Gaffri, Peter Gillette, Hugh Kingery, Christina Leslie, Deb Ostergard, Bridget Sanders, Camille Schiraldi, Daren Seex, Mike Serruto, Bea Weaver'
- Area 8 – Chatfield Reservoir: **Joey Kellner**, David Bailey, Mitchell Bailey, Julia Gwinn, Grace Kurland, Joe Kurland, Dominique Loucks, Thomas Loucks, Mark Meiklejohn, Senja Meiklejohn, Mary Fran O'Connor, Robert Raker
- Area 9 – Upper South Platte: **Jill Holden**, Lynn Forrester, Betty Glass, Mary Keithler, Meredith McBurney
- Area 10 – Lower Deer Creek: **Michael Lester**, Autumn Amici, Mary Cay Burger, Luke Buckardt, Kathy Mihm-Dunning
- Area 11 – Upper Deer Creek: **Chuck Hundertmark**, David Binkley, Marilyn Binkley, Ted Cooper, Laurie Gibb, Toni Rautus, John Sakulich
- Area 12 – Yegge Peak: **David Hill**, **Cynthia Madsen**, Audrey Boag, Ann Bonnell, Dale Campau, Martha Eubanks, Celia Greenman, Michael Kiessig, Graham Ray, Else van Erp
- Area 13 – Doublehead Mountain: **Amy Davis**, Jill Boice, Nancy Davis, Tim Davis
- Area 14 – North Turkey Creek: **Sue Summers**, Susan Blansett, Ed Furlong, Roger Koester
- Area 15 – Indian Hills: **Dick Prickett**, Brad Andres, Nancy Bartholomew, Ben Drenth, Caroline Gilbert, Gregg Goodrich, Susan Harper, Bob Holmes, Warren Roske, Jeanette Strom
- Area 16 – Upper Bear Creek: **Laura Steadman**, Spencer England, Melissa Mezger
- Area 17 – Ken Caryl Ranch: **Tom Bush**, Kent Bagley, Jodie Barr, Sangeeta Chakraborty, Martha Delporte, Dwayne Dickerson, Karen Drozda, Lisa Mason, Kenyon Moon, Marj Nelson, Molly Niven, Jennifer O'Keefe, Tim Redmond, Sarah Shibaro, Peter Strom, Natalie Vande Vuss, Scott Yarberry
- Area 18 – Garrison Gate: **Bob Shade**, Patrick O'Driscoll
- Area 19 – Morrison/Willow Brook: **Chris Gilbert**, Steve Meier, Josh Smith
- Area 20 – Willow Creek: **David Suddjian**, Polly Reetz, Diane Roberts, Karen Strong
- Area 21 – Mount Lindo/Willow Springs: **Bob Shade**, Erich Ball, Eric Dinkel, Reed Gorner, Patrick O'Driscoll



Pygmy Nuthatch
Jim Esten



Trumpeter Swans
Jim Esten



FROM THE PRESIDENT

National Bird-Feeding Month ... and a nestful of DFO news

Dave Hill, President

Since 1994, February has been designated [National Bird-Feeding Month](#). In the middle of winter when food resources are most limited, February is one of the toughest months of the year for birds to survive. This monthly observance was created to encourage us to provide food, water and shelter to wild birds. Feeding them now helps populations through the winter – and it also provides entertainment and the wonder of nature to birders and other wildlife lovers in our own backyards.

Here are four quick tips for helping keep winter birds happy and alive:

- Add another feeder to your yard
- Add a heated water source to your yard
- Participate in the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) Feb. 14-17
- Learn more about a new species and figure out how to attract it to your yard

Since the last time I wrote in this space, Denver Field Ornithologists has been busy not only with the usual slate of field trips each month but also the volunteer business of our club. Here are the latest details:

- DFO's **Better Birding Skills Committee** is about to announce another learning workshop, and it may be about woodpeckers. Stay tuned for details soon.
- Our **Communications and Outreach Committee**, which oversees our monthly publication of *The Lark Bunting* and ongoing management of DFO's website, has just added a DFO Instagram account. Check out our account and hastags at:
@denverfieldornithologists
#denverfieldornithologists
#dfobirders
- The recently formed **Conservation Committee** is conducting a vote that, if passed, will add DFO's

endorsement to Denver Audubon's request that hunters use only non-lead ammunition to decrease lead poisoning of birds and other wildlife.

- DFO's **Field Trip Committee** is now at work updating and revising our club's trip leader training and the field trip leader manual.
- The **Finance Committee** is working on the annual review of DFO's income and expenses.
- The **Grants Committee** is now evaluating research and education project proposals as potential recipients for grants from DFO.
- DFO Historian Kris Haglund is gathering historical information about our club to share with you throughout DFO's 85th birthday celebration this year.
- Our newly formed **Membership Committee** is gathering ideas and working on strategies for attracting more young adults and families to DFO membership, a key goal of the DFO Board's three-year strategic plan.
- The **Nominations Committee** is working to recruit more member volunteers to fill out our club committees.
- **Programs** chairman Bill Turner has recruited speakers for our spring and early fall monthly program meetings on the fourth Monday night of the month.
- We are setting up a meeting with representatives of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science by the end of February to discuss DFO's return to the museum's Ricketson Auditorium. DFO left the Ricketson, our longtime monthly program location, for all of 2019 and into 2020 to accommodate a major remodeling project for that part of the museum.

As always, a big THANK YOU to all of our DFO volunteers for all that you do, from field trips to committee involvement and beyond. You are the ones who make DFO happen!



Jason B Bidgood and Terra
Noah Bidgood

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

Sand Creek/ Westerly Creek @ Stapleton

Jason B. Bidgood

Like many of you, my interest in birds began at home, casually watching backyard visitors to the feeder. But as my curiosity about birds grew over the next few years, I found that just waiting around to see what came into the yard wasn't enough. One day in the spring, I saw American White Pelicans on the open space ponds nearby. Viewing them up close as they sailed across the water, it dawned on me: If these amazing creatures are here, what else have I been missing?

With my interest sparked, I began to consider myself a birder. On New Year's Day, 2015, I took it up for real. I set up an eBird account, walked out of my backyard and began to explore the nearby open space. That very first day, I noticed some unfamiliar ducks; I guess I'd never really looked at waterfowl before that. Leafing through my field guide, I realized I was looking at Gadwalls and American Wigeons – life birds!

That day, the open space became my patch. It consists of the strip of land that borders Sand Creek and Westerly Creek in Denver's Stapleton neighborhood. It's roughly a mile and a half of Westerly Creek – downstream and north of Montview Boulevard to where it enters Sand Creek – plus about a mile of Sand Creek between Havana Street and Smith Road.

Starting out, birding was only an occasional thing, something I did if I had the time. I soon found that birding close to home has advantages when you have a family with young children. If I brought along binoculars on a walk or bike ride with my kids, brief stops to look at birds became part of the outing, not a separate or major time commitment away by myself.

When we adopted our dog Terra, my birding time and the number of visits to my patch grew exponentially. Even if I'm not keeping an eBird list, I usually bring my binoculars along on dog walks because you never know what might be out there, especially during spring and fall migration. Whether it's 20 minutes before work in the morning or an hour or more on a Saturday or Sunday, the minutes really add up. In the past five years, I've logged about 750 eBird checklists and found 145 species of birds in my patch, including a couple of unexpected rarities.

When I started, I knew little about what species I might find in my patch or how its bird life would change through the year. Now I look forward to the seasonal changes, finding and listing birds, and learning their habits and behaviors.

Spring is by far my favorite, especially birding in the morning along Westerly Creek. The exhilarating morning chorus of birdsong in spring always lures me out of bed early. Here in mid-winter, I'm already anticipating the first returning spring migrants like Cinnamon Teal, Western Meadowlark and Killdeer, even though they won't arrive until March. On a Wednesday last April, a rare Hooded Oriole made a one-day appearance in Westerly Creek Park. Had I not been out early walking Terra, that unusual visitor likely would have gone unnoticed. Come May, which can be great for finding migrant birds anywhere in Denver, the native grasses of the Westerly Creek open space can harbor Lark Buntings and Eastern Kingbirds on their way north. In the willows along the creeks and ponds, Gray Catbirds and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers aren't uncommon.

Although there are fewer birds around after May, I'm learning which ones nest in my patch. Several pairs of Cinnamon Teal have nested in the Westerly Creek corridor the past few years. You might be surprised – I know I was – to learn that Black-chinned Hummingbirds nest there, too. They are

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around fairly reliably from May through September. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, another uncommon bird elsewhere in town, has been a regular in my patch the past few years. A handful of these guys shows up along Westerly Creek in September and stays until spring.

My patch's birdlife can get a little monotonous by late summer, but like spring, the autumn can bring surprises. One Sunday morning last September, I was (again!) walking the dog along Sand Creek when I spotted a weird-looking, long-tailed black bird on a branch in a dead tree. It turned out to be a Groove-billed Ani. That vagrant visitor from far south that stayed around for almost two weeks, to the delight of several hundred birders.

Now it is winter, when Westerly Creek and the small ponds along it are often frozen. But the open water on Sand Creek brings a good variety of ducks, and Green-winged Teal and Gadwall especially seem to like this stretch. Seeing 20 to 30 of each on a walk isn't unusual.

For me, birding a patch close to home was a convenient way to go from casual backyard observer to more focused "real" birder. Although my only goal was to learn what birds were around my patch, doing so has taught me one of the best lessons a birder can learn: The more you look, the more you'll see.



Woodhouse's Scrub
Jason B. Bidgood

Snippets from DFO's Past: "Rare Bird Ruth" and the dangerous birder

EDITOR'S NOTE: Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 on March 20, 2020. One of the club's 48 charter members was Ruth Wheeler. Ruth remained active in the Colorado Bird Club (as it was called when it was formed in 1935) and was the first recipient of the Ptarmigan Award in 1988. Bob Righter, who was fortunate to know Wheeler, shares this recollection of her. Look for more Snippets from DFO's Past in the coming months.

Bob Righter

I joined the DFO about 40 years ago, just to see what the buzz was about. All it took was one field trip for me to become hooked on the DFO and birding.

Although I was enthusiastic, I was also a dangerous birder. I was sure that every bird I saw was rare. At the time, I was living on the 20th floor of a high-rise in downtown Denver, and I frequently birded looking out the windows. One day I saw a flock of about 20 falcon-like birds. Lunging for my newly acquired *Golden Guide* for birds, I became convinced these were all Peregrine Falcons. No question about it, this was information that Ruth Wheeler, then the manager of the rare bird alert, needed to hear about right now.

The phone call went something like this: when Ruth answered, I excitedly blurted out, "Ruth, Ruth! I have just seen a flock of 20 Peregrine Falcons, circling around the parking lot below my window." She responded calmly and slowly; "Bob, that would be extremely rare to see a flock of Peregrine Falcons, as they are usually seen only in ones or twos. However, the Rock Pigeon is very common in downtown Denver and frequently flies in large flocks. They kind of look like falcons, so I can see how you could confuse them with Peregrines." From that point on, I just adored Ruth.

As manager of the rare bird alert, Ruth would personally call all of those who had expressed interest. She was one of those people who form the heart and soul of DFO. She served as vice president during the early years of the organization and she would do anything to help with whatever needed to be done. If an organization could have a grandmother, Ruth Wheeler would have fitted the bill for the DFO.

Welcome to new DFO members

Kathleen Bahr, Englewood; David and Marilyn Binkley, Highlands Ranch; Michael Brady, Chester Springs; Helen Butts, Denver; Frank Coons, Denver; Donna and Terry Flageolle, Westminster; Laurie Gibb, Denver; Heather Hanneman, Denver; Jason Kaza, Indian Hills; Marie Cécile "Cici" Lee, Elbert; James McCall, Arvada; Andrew Morris, Denver; Mary Melly and Aleksei Saunders, Aurora; David Shafer, Lakewood; Linda Sheppard, Lakewood; Kelly Uhing, Denver; Noel Waechter, Littleton

Thank you for your contribution to the Research, Education, and Conservation Grant Fund

Meredith Anderson
Margaret Arp
Diane Birks
Michael Brady
Karel Buckley
Tom and Mary Cay Burger
Deborah Carstensen
Frank Coons
Kevin Corwin
Giuseppe and Roxana Rogers De Sole
Ann Sprague and Jo-Ann Garavaglia
Audrey Gilden
Ann Troth and Gregg Goodrich
Suzanne Grady
Terry and Becca Hammons
John Hoogerheide
Jan Friedlander and Cynthia Kristensen
Rex McGehee
Chuck and Mary Metzger
Michael Wilson and Barbara Nabors
Randall Nelson
Tammy and Ira Sanders
Mary Beth Searles
David Shafer
Connie and Joyce Takamine
Bobbi Vollmer
Noel Waechter
Joan and Jack Whiting

JANUARY PROGRAM REVIEW

Birds of a feather: Ducks Unlimited's Colorado work benefits birders, too

By Patrick O'Driscoll

There's been kind of a dichotomy between people who hunt and people who bird. But it doesn't necessarily have to be that way, and I think that we can't afford for it to be that way in the future.

With that message – and a personal introduction that featured family roots in both camps – DFO January program speaker Matt Reddy opened his data-rich presentation, “The History and Future of Waterfowl Conservation in Colorado.”

Reddy, regional biologist in Colorado and Wyoming for Ducks Unlimited (DU), demonstrated that waterfowl hunters (DU's core membership) and birders (the core of DFO) have much more in common than we may think. His Jan. 27 presentation kept a rapt DFO audience in their seats well past the usual concluding time.

Program chair Bill Turner introduced Reddy as a new DFO member and contributor to the club's grant fund. In a few introductory slides, Reddy shared faded photos and family keepsakes that map his dual pedigree – from his great-uncle Dick's membership card the year Ducks Unlimited was founded (1937) to a portrait of his great-aunt Dor Duffner, who was a widely traveled birder in the 1920s, '30s and '40s.

When later discussing the good done for bird habitat with funds from the sale of federal and state duck stamps, Reddy celebrated the convergence of early concern in the 1930s for our feathered friends. He noted that the first federal Duck Stamp was issued in 1935, “the same year that you guys were formed.” Indeed, the Colorado Bird Club – today the Denver Field Ornithologists – was born in 1935, too.

A South Dakota native and University of Northern Colorado graduate, Reddy is a 25-year veteran of DU who acquires land



and improves habitat in CO and WY. He traced the history of waterfowl management, particularly on his home turf – the Central Flyway that includes the eastern half of Colorado. He described how older, sometimes odder strategies – exploding marshes with TNT, for instance, to “improve” duck habitat – gave way to better science and today's focus on more habitat as the key to more birds. Reddy said what is best for most of the waterfowl that migrate through Colorado is the opposite of blasting holes with dynamite. Dabbling ducks thrive in shallow-water wetland tracts just 4-6 inches deep, shaped with subtly contoured embankments and low-lying culverts to better use and move the water that makes it all work.

Reddy's love of wetlands is evident. He described seasonal marshes, when working right, that sprout abundant native plants, bugs and other duck food – from smartweed and bloodworms (iron-rich midge larvae) to duckweed, fairy shrimp and snails. “It's a gigantic buffet of food just when they need it the most,” he added. No wonder he calls what he does “turning dirt to build marshes,” working with farmers and other landowners to create and improve seasonal wetlands without diminishing their lands and livelihoods.

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Throughout his talk, Reddy sprinkled wildly varied snippets of interesting facts about waterfowl and birds in general:

- Despite the recent finding in a study in *Science* that North American bird species have lost nearly 3 billion birds since 1970, Reddy said duck numbers in the same period actually have risen by 34.8 million
- Monte Vista NWR in southern Colorado once had the highest density of nesting Mallards ever recorded anywhere
- Nonbreeding waterfowl spend their time a lot like human teenagers do, Reddy said to audience laughter. He then posted a slide of stats to prove it: 40 percent of the time eating, 40 percent resting/sleeping, 8 percent preening, 10 percent flying, 1 percent fighting and 1 percent in courtship
- The banding of birds that birding organizations promote actually descends from early programs (including in Colorado) that first banded ducks at the dawn of American waterfowl conservation
- There's a mathematical formula for the energy cost of bird flight, and Reddy said it involves metabolic rates and "k-calorie bird-hours." For us lay people, he boiled it down to each migrating bird needing to consume the energy equivalent of a 200-pound Snickers candy bar
- Asked about the effects of lead shot, Reddy said destruction of native grasslands "is a much more significant issue." He also said resulting diseases such as cholera and botulism "can kill far more than lead shot"

Returning to the duck stamp, Reddy made a pitch for birders to join waterfowl hunters in this vital way to fund habitat improvement. He noted that the number of duck hunters is falling just as waterfowl numbers are rising: "If we rely on that model where the duck hunters are the population paying for this conservation, it's not going to cover it." (The federal stamp is available at post offices or online via the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service website](#). Colorado Waterfowl Stamps are available through the [Colorado Parks & Wildlife website](#).)

Reddy said the future of Colorado waterfowl management is all about the water. He displayed a "gap graph" showing that,

by 2050, the amount needed to slake the state's collective thirst will be twice what's available now. Collaboration is the only way through. He described a promising project on federal Bureau of Reclamation land meant for a long-ago dam proposal on the Plains that never materialized. DU and state, federal and private partners aim to create a wetland basin there that could serve waterfowl's seasonal needs while acting as a large recharge site to return water to the South Platte to meet required delivery downstream to Nebraska.

Reddy said that basin could also serve waterfowl hunters and birders – evidence, perhaps, that what's good for the goose (and duck) hunter is good for those who gander.

This program was videotaped. To view, go to the [Past Programs page](#) on the DFO website and click on the movie-camera icon for the Jan. 27 program video.

Program night @ DFO: Got a speaker in mind?

Monthly programs are shaping up for the rest of DFO's 85th anniversary year, but we are always looking for more ideas for speakers and presentations.

Who or what topic would YOU like to hear more about at one of our fourth-Monday-night gatherings?

DFO Program chair Bill Turner would love to hear your suggestions, be they local or national birding figures, or bird-related subjects in Colorado, the nation or the world.

Send your suggestions to Bill at toursbyturner@aol.com. Thanks!

INTRODUCING A NEW FEATURE:

Birding with 20/20 Vision

Susan Blansett, vice president

As members and volunteers in Denver Field Ornithologists, we are aware that birds and all other living things are connected – and that threats to the continued existence of birds and habitats are many and varied. We also know there's a lot of confusion and debate about those threats, depending on the source.

This is the first in a series of monthly pieces in *The Lark Bunting* dedicated to exploring more deeply what conservation means to us – as a club, as birders, and as responsible citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. The aim of “Birding with 20/20 Vision” is simple:

To inform and inspire DFO members and our larger community of followers to do what we can to protect birds and their habitats

We'll focus primarily on metro Denver and Colorado. Article topics may vary widely –stemming habitat loss and threats to our Colorado species, dealing with waste or recycling, reducing individual and group carbon footprints, learning how other clubs like ours tackle conservation or climate change, promoting native vs. non-native vegetation, sharing news of progress on these and bird-friendly innovation, and more. In each article, we may share:

- Personal action – what can I / you / we do?
- Political action – what should those who manage or exercise control and influence over these matters (both government and non-government) be doing? This is about being an informed citizen and voting your conscience. DFO's “20/20 Vision” series will NOT be telling you how to vote.

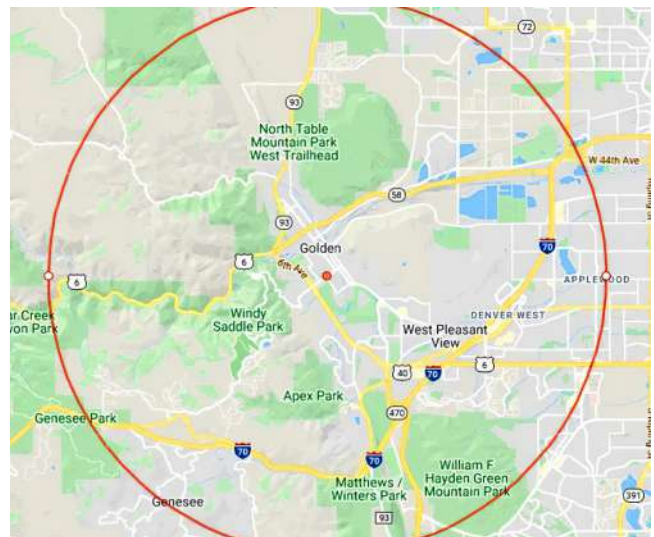
Our pledge to you is that installments in this monthly column will be fact-based, supported by science, and offered with inspiration but NOT with preaching. We want to hear YOUR ideas. In fact, we're seeking contributors like you to help us publish a great series with a variety of perspectives and voices.

FIRST UP: 5-MILE-RADIUS BIRDING

With our series preamble out of the way, the first installment of *Birding with 20/20 Vision* is about a new trend that came to our attention in a recent email thread on CoBirds: “5MR Birding.” Have you heard of it?

5MR refers to birding more frequently and consistently within a **5-Mile Radius** of your home “patch” – places where no one else birds as regularly as you do. The concept was popularized by Vancouver, WA birder Jen Sanford in her blog “I Used to Hate Birding” (<http://www.iusedtohatebirds.com/p/vancouver-5mr.html>), and it initially won favor as a 5MR annual challenge. A key point of 5MR is to encourage birding in under-reported habitat spots in your local neighborhood. The idea is to expand the variety of habitats for which data is reported on eBird (we don't ALL have to bird the same spots all the time, right?) and to scour nearby spots for seasonal or unusual sightings. After all, rarities can and do happen anywhere!

A key benefit of this close-to-home focus is lowering your carbon footprint. Nearby spots are easier to reach on foot or bicycle or with less fuel consumption than a cross-town trek. Another plus is simply rediscovering a sense of the possible. Many who have tried it report that 5MR has rejuvenated their interest in birding, and they have found (or added) new hotspots. To draw your own 5MR circle, go to <https://www.mapdevelopers.com/draw-circle-tool.php>. It's easy and fun! Fill in your address and this app will draw a circled on a map with your location in the center.



After I drew my 5MR circle, I was immediately inspired to hike Apex Park just outside of Golden, a lovely habitat I had frequently overlooked. By zooming in on the satellite image of my circle, I also found a couple of nice spots I had neglected altogether, and spots within walking distance! Armed with this fun tool, I expect I'll be birding more, and much closer to home, as I get to know my “patch” more thoroughly throughout the year.

I hope you'll check out the links above. Let us know how it works for you, whether you're a newbie or a veteran 5MR birder. Drop me a note at susanblansett@gmail.com.



Burrowing Owl
Jim Esten

“Bird-Friendly, Climate-Friendly”: Living the talk

Colleen Nunn

When I saw the announcement for a conference in Fort Collins with the theme, “Bird-Friendly, Climate-Friendly,” I had to go. These are my two topics of greatest interest and concern, and I wanted to see and hear what others are thinking.

Sponsored by Audubon Rockies with Denver Audubon, the City of Fort Collins and others, this day-long conference on Jan. 11 focused on climate reduction programs and ways we can act to improve things for birds and people in our warming world. The agenda included a live-video keynote address, six sessions with local speakers, and an array of organizational booths. All told, about 50 of us were in attendance.

The program opened with Hollywood actor and environmental activist Ed Begley Jr. (from *St. Elsewhere* to *Living with Ed*) in a live-streamed keynote from California. He gave us a refresher of what homeowners can do to “live the talk” of caring for the environment. He shared his personal interest in environmental issues, from reading Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in the early 1960s to the Clean Air Act (1963), Ohio’s oil-tainted Cuyahoga River catching fire (1969), the first Earth Day (1970), the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency (1970), and the Clean Water Act (1972).

Gentle, considerate and a passionate vegan, Begley impressed us with his solar panels, super-insulated LEED-certified home, and a graywater system for his drought-resistant yard (with olive and fruit trees). A believer in rooftop solar over large-scale industrial solar plants, he also drives an electric car – but only if he can’t walk, cycle or take public transit. Our “breakfast with Begley” was inspiring and friendly (www.begleyliving.com).

Next up was Alison Holloran, executive director of Audubon Rockies, a regional umbrella for the National Audubon Society over CO, UT and WY that works with independent Audubon chapters from its Fort Collins headquarters. She addressed the recent report on the threat of climate change to birds, *Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink*. In the report, scientists found that two-thirds of 604 North American species face possible extinction if unchecked warming raises the continent’s temperature 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. But she noted the report’s more hopeful finding that humanity can prevent 76 percent of those predicted extinctions by holding the temperature increase to half that, at 1.5 C (2.7 F).

To read about the threat to our state bird, the Lark Bunting, and scores of other Colorado species and their habitats, visit the report’s detailed and interactive [Colorado pages](#).

Holloran said Audubon Rockies also provides training for climate lobbying, including “Getting Green Laws,” a free webinar the first week of February. Although already held before this issue of *The Lark Bunting*, it was representative of the trainings Audubon offers. Holloran also urged conference attendees to write to our congressional representatives to support the Better Energy Storage Act, which would help move the U.S. faster from coal to alternative energy. I think these activities exemplify the best of Audubon’s conservation work.

Before lunch, representatives of Fort Collins and Xcel Energy shared plans to move progressively to non-fossil fuels with 2020, 2030 and 2050 goals. In encouraging utility customers to take energy-saving actions, Xcel’s Jensen Morgan shared statistics about people’s readiness to conserve. He said about 12 percent aren’t motivated, 24 percent worry about the cost, and about 21 percent are neutral. But about 21 percent are enthusiastic about conservation, and 23 percent are “receptive but busy.” Promoters of conservation will need to address time, personal energy, and cost constraints to develop a larger population of conservation-minded people.

The afternoon focused largely on gardening with birds and wildlife. Conservation brochures and a list of websites aimed to help participants learn which plants can attract pollinators to their yards. We also learned of [Habitat Hero](#), an Audubon

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American Goldfinch
Jim Esten

CONFERENCE REVIEW *continued from page 14*

Rockies certification program for creating rich bird habitat with native plants, brush shelter areas, efficient water use and sparing use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Speakers included Byron Kominek, whose [*Jack's Solar Garden*](#) – an experimental farm in solar-agriculture on a small plot in Boulder – is named in memory of his grandfather, who once farmed there. A former Peace Corps volunteer, he tends a pollinator-friendly border of shrubs, trees, and wildflowers, which offer food and cover. Inside the border, solar panels produce 1.2 megawatts of electricity while food plants grow around and beneath the panels. (Plants in the West have been found to thrive in the cooling shade of solar panels that drip moisture to the plants from rain, fog and snow.) Researchers will measure the advantages of this “agrivoltaics” concept.

I enjoyed the conference, but I would like to have had a group session focused on the degrees of climate vulnerability for bird species in Colorado. Which are the most and least vulnerable to climate change? What is happening to their specific habitats? Not only would such a session increase our general knowledge of climate and birds, it also would help us answer questions from friends and on our field trips. Fortunately, we do have the *Survival by Degrees* report to work from.

With this conference, Audubon Rockies has laid a foundation for us. Where shall we go from here?

MARCH FIELD TRIPS

Register for DFO field trips on the [website](#) or contact the leader directly. Dress for the weather. Directions and detailed descriptions of each trip can be found on the website. April field trips will appear on the website on March 1. **Please be considerate and delete your reservation if you are unable to attend a trip for which you have registered.**

Littleton

Monday, March 2

6:30 AM - NOON

David Suddjian

email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail difficulty: Moderate

Maximum participants: 8

We will try to visit several locations in the city of Littleton seeking whatever is around and variety at greenbelts, urban parks, and the South Platte corridor. Some walking at each place, less if recent snow. Be ready to carpool to make navigation through town easier.

Bear Creek Lake Park, Lakewood

Saturday, March 7

7 AM - 2 PM

Mark Amershek

email: mammershek@msn.com

Phone: 303-329-8646

Trail difficulty: Easy

Maximum participants: 12

The park will offer open water, cottonwood forest, and grasslands.

Cherry Creek SP Wetlands Loop (Arapahoe County)

Sunday, March 8

9 AM - 1 PM

Patrick O'Driscoll

email: patodrisk@gmail.com

Phone: 303-885-6955

Trail difficulty: Moderate

In DFO's 85th anniversary year, we are reviving this monthly half-day of walking -- led for several years by Karen von Saltza -- through most of the important habitats in Cherry Creek State Park. Its year-round progression of species and seasons makes this an ideal monthly trip both for beginners and veteran birders. Expect to walk about 3 miles along level paths.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR

Saturday, March 14

8 AM - NOON

Colleen Nunn

email: cnunn6789@gmail.com

Phone: 303-520-7496

Trail difficulty: Easy

Maximum participants: 12

We hope to see late shorebird migrants and many waterfowl and raptors. Be prepared to carpool because parking is limited at the lakes. Bison and deer likely, too. We will walk on level trails only, for 2 miles max. Good for beginning birders. Bathrooms at visitor center open at 9 a.m., but pit-toilet restrooms available by lakes Mary and Ladora.

Chatfield State Park Dog Park

Saturday, March 14

8:30 - 11 AM

Diane Roberts

email: Samatha576@aol.com

Phone: 720-278-9025

Trail difficulty: Easy

Maximum participants: 9

Many members go birding with well-behaved dogs on leash. Here's a fun opportunity to meet at Chatfield's off-leash dog area and let our canine friends run around for 30 minutes or so. Then we will leash them and go birding along the east side in the field area along a creek, not the South Platte.

First Creek at RM Arsenal

Sunday, March 15

7:30 AM - NOON

Patrick O'Driscoll

email: patodrisk@gmail.com

Phone: 303-885-6955

Trail difficulty: Moderate

2020 marks the third year of public birding along First Creek on the east side of the Arsenal and the fourth along the First Creek @ DEN Open Space path. We'll bird both sides, looking for early songbirds and other migrants and (some) winter residents beginning to leave. Prepare to walk 3-4 miles over dirt-gravel trail in the Arsenal and paved path on the DEN side. NOTE: No restrooms; closest pre-trip pit stop is Green Valley Ranch King Sooper's off Tower Road.

Banner Lakes SWA (Weld County)**Saturday, March 21****7 AM - 1 PM**

Mark Amershek

email: mammershek@msn.com

Phone: 303-329-8646

Trail difficulty: Moderate

Maximum participants: 12

We will bird the north and possibly the south sides of the area. There are numerous small- to medium-sized ponds, many ringed with marshes, Russian olives, and junipers. Moderate on- and off-trail hiking of about 3-4 miles. Scopes helpful but not necessary. Potential for a hawk/ owl search of the DIA loop in the afternoon.

eBird field Training**Carson Nature Center****Sunday, March 22****7:30 - 11 AM**

Gregg Goodrich

email: GreggGoodrich@gmail.com

Phone: 303-655-9135

Trail difficulty: Easy

Maximum participants: 8

This is an eBird training trip. You will learn to use the eBird mobile app on your phone to enter your checklists from the field. If you have been using the app for a short time, you will become more proficient. With several nearby hotspots, we will practice entering several checklists.

Southeastern Colorado**Tuesday, March 24****5:30 AM - 7 PM**

David Suddjian

email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail difficulty: Strenuous

Maximum participants: 8

This trip will target Cheyenne and Kiowa counties. If water conditions are good we will visit the Queens Reservoirs SWA. We hope to see raptors, longspurs, Mountain Plover and other early migrant shorebirds. The wide-open Cheyenne prairie is especially under-birded in March, so our efforts will add eBird data there.

Rueter-Hess Reservoir (Douglas Co.)**Wednesday, March 25****7:30 AM - NOON**

Tim Ryan & Diane Roberts

email: Tryan4thebirds@yahoo.com

Phone: 720-545-5084

Trail difficulty: Easy

Maximum participants: 9

We can expect a variety of raptors, and many land bird species will be coming in. We will meet and bird around Bar CCC. Parker Water Department provides us with a guide and a bus to ride over to Rueter-Hess Reservoir. This is a gated and restricted area. Therefore, it is necessary to stay the entire trip with no early departures. There are pit toilets at both locations. Bring a scope if you have one.

Bluff Lake Nature Center**Saturday, March 28****7:30 AM - NOON**

Megan Miller

email: megan.k.miller2473@gmail.com

Phone: 720-775-9710

Trail difficulty: Easy

Maximum participants: 15

Bluff Lake offers a great range of habitat: wetland, yucca, and large cottonwoods. This attracts a variety of raptors and songbirds. Pit toilets onsite but no drinking water. Paths are easy walking trails. We'll walk 1 to 1.5 miles. Scopes are optional.

Cañon City**Sunday, March 29****6 AM - 5 PM**

Mark Amershek

email: mammershek@msn.com

Phone: 303-329-8646

Trail difficulty: Moderate

Maximum participants: 12

Expect to see Scaled Quail, Canyon Wren, Rock Wren, Mountain Bluebirds. We can hope for Juniper Titmouse, and Pinyon Jay. Pack a lunch.

Button Rock Preserve**Sunday, March 29****6:30 AM - 2 PM**

Chris Gilbert

email: chrisgee9@gmail.com

Phone: 804-214-1508

Trail difficulty: Strenuous

A great hiking/birding spot with typical forest birds of mid-altitude. Reservoir, in season, should have waterfowl. Bring lunch. One area has some switchbacks so hiking poles and/or Yaktrax may be helpful. Total hike about 7 miles.

South-Central Colorado**Tuesday, March 31****5:30 AM - 7 PM**

David Suddjian

email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail difficulty: Strenuous

Maximum participants: 12

This trip will cruise through some of the most wonderful Colorado country as we target Huerfano and Custer counties and possibly Fremont County, too. This is a great time for migrant waterfowl and early shorebirds. We will carpool from the meeting spot. Bring all food and drink you will need. Restrooms somewhat limited.



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email (legible) _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 56 | ISSUE 04 | APRIL 2020

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

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BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

JeffCo's White Ranch Park

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Bald Eagle

📷 Jim Esten

📍 Barr Lake State Park, CO





Peregrine Falcon
Perry Conway

Falcons: Streamlined For SPEED!

Monday, March 23
Perry Conway

Veteran wildlife photographer **Perry Conway** describes himself as an educator with a camera, and he has presented programs on the value of wildlife and wild places to more than 2 million people. He is the featured speaker for DFO's monthly evening program on March 23, "Falcons: Streamlined for SPEED!"

Conway, a free-lance naturalist, photographer and CEO of the Aerie Nature Series of photographic and education programs, knows a bit about his subject. He first became involved with falcons in graduate school at Kansas State University, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in biology and biological sciences. He worked first as a researcher and bird bander and later in falcon recovery efforts.

Working on a team to reintroduce Peregrine Falcons back into Colorado, he had firsthand knowledge about how and why this remarkable raptor has made its way off the federal Endangered Species List. His illustrated lecture and multimedia show for DFO will look at falcons worldwide (there are about 40 species around the globe). He'll touch on their evolution, history and population status today.

And if you have heard the familiar factoid that peregrines are the fastest creature on Earth, stand by for a surprise. They are not – but Conway will tell you what IS. On March 23, join us – and the more than 2 million people to whom Conway has presented programs – to learn more on the value of wildlife and wild places.

Upcoming program this spring:

April 27 – "Homogenization of Colorado Nesting Bird Populations" with Steve Jones

7 PM | Free and open to the public
Unity Spiritual Center of Denver
3021 S. University Blvd.
Denver, Colorado

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for August. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be made to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy 85th Birthday, DFO: Your history is deep in Colorado's birding DNA

Dave Hill

Cheers, everyone, and Happy 85th Birthday, DFO! Yes, 85 years ago this month, the Colorado Bird Club – renamed Denver Field Ornithologists in 1964 – was chartered.

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science keeps our archives, from board minutes and committee reports to *The Lark Bunting* newsletters and many more items of interest. DFO historian **Kris Haglund** (also a DMNS staffer) recently delved into those records at my request for glimpses of our club's history and DFO's influence on the origins of other Colorado bird organizations. I'd like to share three.

The first is an account of DFO's founding by **Margaret E. Pritchett**, the club's first recording secretary.

"The Colorado Bird Club was started January 27th, 1935, when some students in Mr. **Robert J. Niedrach**'s Denver University Extension Class in Ornithology wished to continue their interest in bird study in a group or club. . . . The group named themselves the Colorado Bird Club and was officially chartered on March 20, 1935. . . . The Colorado Bird Club insignia, a colorful, circular watercolor painting of the Colorado State Bird, the Lark Bunting flying above a yucca plant on the prairie, was made by **Charles Tribble**, a young artist who made the painted background for the Duck-billed Dinosaur display in the Museum Mr. Niedrach advised that the club keep out of political wrangling which has been detrimental to a number of outdoor organizations, but that the group should stand back of, that is, support laws for bird protection."

The second glimpse is of DFO's role in creating Colorado Field Ornithologists. Longtime member **Hugh Kingery** and former DFO historian **Warren Finch** provided the narrative.

Kingery:

"Essentially, the Colorado Bird Club organized three state 'conventions.' The effort started in 1962, but postponed the first meeting to 1963, which they held in Denver (headquartered at the Museum). **Lois Webster** chaired the organizing committee. One hundred attended and they saw 128 species of birds on the field trips. The Bird Club organized the second statewide meeting in 1964 in Fort Collins at the invitation of **Ron Ryder**. At the third meeting, in Colorado Springs in 1965, the attendees organized the Colorado Field Ornithologists with President **Thompson Marsh** and Secretary Lois Webster."

Finch, from the article "The Denver Field Ornithologists – Watching birds since 1935," in the October 2003 issue of CFO's Colorado Birds:

"Due to prolonged, persistent agitation by members of five Front Range bird clubs for an annual state convention, **Harold Holt**, President of the (Colorado Bird Club), appointed Lois Webster to chair a committee to organize the first state convention in 1963, which was hosted by CBC in Denver. . . ."

The last anecdote is how DFO was present at the creation of the Denver Audubon Society, and how our club changed its name to clear up confusion with another group's surprisingly similar name. Here again, Warren Finch carried the first narrative, and former member **Lynn Wilcoxon** the second.

Finch:

"From 1961, and perhaps as early as 1957 and as late as 1964, the Colorado Bird Club was affiliated with the National Audubon Society, but never as an Audubon Chapter. In 1965, the Denver Field Ornithologists was offered Chapter status, but DFO members voted to follow its original bird watching mission and not the broader mission of the Audubon

Continued on page 4

Society The clear separation of bird watching [DFO] and environmental [Audubon] focuses has proved to be a success.”

Wilcoxon:

“[W]e were constantly getting confused with the Colorado Caged Bird Club [and] so felt it necessary to change our name, which we did to DFO. At the same time there were many members . . . who thought that the club should be more interested in conservation and legislative matters, but yet the core group wanted to continue with our primary focus being field trips. So it was a friendly separation with some members deciding to establish a local chapter of the Audubon Society. Many DFO members . . . belonged to both.”

We have these accounts thanks to DMNS’s archives of DFO. As former member (and museum staffer) **Carol Cochran** wrote in the June 2012 issue of *The Lark Bunting*:

“These records . . . are a lot of fun to read, and provide important historical and ornithological information. You are welcome, and in fact encouraged, to view them for yourselves – and to contribute your own portion of the history of DFO and Colorado birding with donations of your field notes, check lists, photos, scrapbooks and other materials.”

DFO NEWS



DFO is on Instagram: Got the picture?

In an effort to market Denver Field Ornithologists and its many activities and interests to the widest possible audience, DFO now has its own page on Instagram, the popular, photo-centric social media app. Have you visited it yet?

If you go to the DFO website, you’ll see that we now display the Instagram icon at the top of the page. See it there? It’s next to the icon for our club’s other prime social media presence, Facebook. Click on the Instagram icon and you’ll see our page.

Got a good photo of people having fun birding, or of a bird doing something interesting? Send it – along with a line or two of text about it – to one of our two contact people who can post it to the DFO page:

Megan Miller

DFO Instagram coordinator
megan.k.miller2473@gmail.com

Sharon Tinianow

DFO Communications & Outreach chair
sharontinianow@gmail.com

And if you’re on Instagram yourself already, start following DFO there. The DFO Communications & Outreach Committee’s realistic goal for 2020 is to build our Instagram audience to 500 followers. Help us go viral! You can find us on Instagram **@denverfieldornithologists** and by following the hashtag **#DFObirders**.

Get in the picture today!

Welcome to new DFO members

Donna Feldman, Denver; Carolyn Weichmann, Larkspur; Rob & Michele Worrall, Denver

Thank you for your contribution to the Research, Education, and Conservation Grant Fund

Jim Esten, Patricia Flood, Merikay Haggert, Elissa McAlear, Diana Tomback
Rob & Michele Worrall

“Wild Patagonia” through the eyes and lens of a nature-loving teen

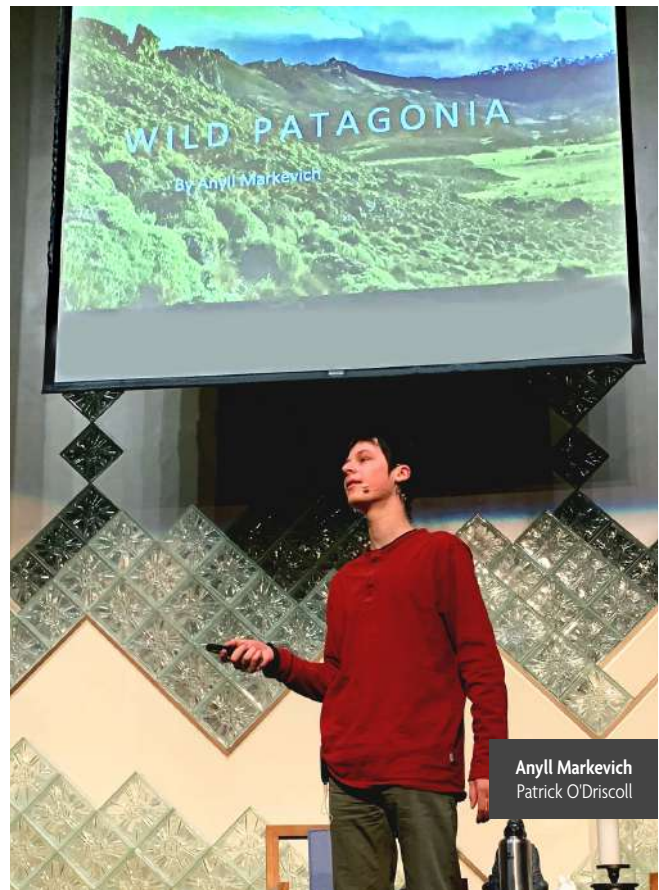
Candice and Tim Johnson

On February 24, DFO members were treated to an evening program by a 16-year-old high school student who is a naturalist, environmentalist, and photographer who also has watched wolves in Yellowstone National Park.

Anyll Markevich, a member of Boulder County Audubon Teen Naturalists, led his DFO audience through “Wild Patagonia,” a lecture and slide show about the month-long trip he took with his family last year to the wild southern reaches of South America. They traveled last November (springtime in the Southern Hemisphere) to the southernmost part of Chile and neighboring Argentina to visit several national parks. This included a 4-day backpacking trip that was no walk in the park – it rained the whole time on their 23-mile trek through Chile’s Torres del Paine National Park.

Anyll and his family first arrived in Punta Arenas, Chile, on the Straits of Magellan, the fabled natural – and navigable – sea route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Their first stops were to see birds. On Isla Magdalena, they visited a small colony of Magellanic Penguins. Although the birds were photogenic and fun to see, Anyll said he regretted having visited them because he learned while there that excessive tourist visitation threatens the colony’s existence. A better managed colony of birds on Tierra del Fuego was their next stop, near the fishing village of Porvenir. Timed admission of tourist visitors meant less human impact on that colony of King Penguins.

As befitted the title of his presentation, Anyll encountered much wildlife on the trip, from small herds of guanaco (a relative of the alpaca) to the common (and handsome) Upland Goose. At Pali-Aike National Park, they encountered Chilean Flamingoes and the ostrich-like Lesser Rhea, a flightless bird more than 3 feet tall. Anyll learned that this species is notable because rhea males incubate the eggs of several females in the same nest.



After the family’s slog through rainy Torres del Paine, they crossed the border into Argentina to visit Perito Moreno Glacier in Los Glaciares National Park. The glacier is noteworthy because, unlike most others across the globe, Perito Moreno is not shrinking but stable, thanks to increased rainfall in the region.

Andean Condors (the largest flying birds in the world), Southern Lapwings and many more guanaco awaited in Patagonia National Park, where much of the landscape is grassland reclaimed from livestock overgrazing. Anyll told of how an American couple –the late **Douglas Tompkins**, founder of North Face outdoor clothing, and his wife, **Kristine**, former CEO of Patagonia outdoor products – worked together to create large wildland conservation areas in both Chile and Argentina. In the case of Patagonia National Park, they purchased vast tracts of former grasslands, removed invasive plants, and reintroduced Lesser Rhea and an endangered native species of deer. Now the park is undergoing further development to accommodate visitors. Anyll said it has a spectacular museum.

Continued on page 6

In fact, published reports in *The New York Times* and elsewhere describe the Tompkinses as having struck an impressive deal with the Chilean government. The couple would donate more than 1 million of their acres to the government if it would commit to creating new national parks and chip in with additional lands of its own. Chile went them one better, contributing 9 million acres, enough for five new parks and expansion of three others. The deal was described as a rare “win” in a region where human industry – agriculture, logging and mining – are constant threats to national landscapes. Since Douglas’s death in a kayaking accident in Patagonia in 2015, Kristine Tompkins has continued to advocate for wild landscapes there.

This program was videotaped. To view, go to the [Past Programs page](#) on the DFO website and click on the movie-camera icon for the Feb. 24 program video.

Program night ideas welcome!

DFO welcomes your suggestions for future speakers and presentations. Who or what topic would YOU like to hear more about at our monthly fourth-Monday-night programs?

DFO Program chair Bill Turner would love to hear from you.

Send your ideas to Bill at toursbyturner@aol.com.



Will YOU Shoot *The Lark Bunting's* Next Cover Photo?

Ever since redesigning DFO's newsletter last year, we've been looking for excellent Colorado bird photos to anchor our magazine-like front page.

Do YOU have what it takes to take a cover photo for *The Lark Bunting*?

We are looking for great photos – in color, nicely lit, sharply focused – of the birds we see in our state in the course of the year. Perhaps it's a seasonal shot of a winged winter visitor . . . or of a newly arrived spring migrant or summer nester. An adult, a fledgling, a flock.

Whatever the bird(s) or the situation, we'd love to see it – and perhaps feature it on the front of an upcoming issue of DFO's monthly newsletter. Or, if not on the cover, perhaps with a nice display “inside” the newsletter to accompany an article or other content.

Although photographers know that capturing a great image depends on skill and sometimes a good dose of luck, the requirements are straightforward and simple:

- Photographers must be members of Denver Field Ornithologists (if you are not but want to submit, go to the DFO website's [membership page](#) first to join the club!)
- Photographers are asked to submit original, unedited photo files – not yet sized or cropped. If you're not sure, contact **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting* at jcesten@gmail.com.

Send your photos or direct any other questions to photo editor Jim at the same address. Thanks!



Susan Blansett

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

JeffCo's White Ranch Park

Susan Blansett

Although I grew up in Illinois with a love of the outdoors and wildlife, I didn't really become a birder until I moved to Colorado in the late 1980s. That's when Mark and I, enthralled with mountain hiking nearby, headed west every weekend to explore a new trail. The thrill of seeing and hearing unfamiliar birds led me to purchase my first Peterson guide (and Mark his first Sierra Club guide to trees and plants). Within a year, I was hooked – and yet, I pursued birding only as a solitary hobby until years later.

We made our new home in Golden, where I also rediscovered a fascination with horses. That's how I met Dan, a volunteer at nearby White Ranch Park, who needed help exercising his mounts. So began my introduction to White Ranch Open Space, where Dan (on his Quarter Horse mare) led me (on Windy, a Morgan gelding) on countless trail rides. As we rode through White Ranch's marvelous variety of habitat and wildlife, Dan shared impressive knowledge of the flora, fauna and geology around us. Exploring virtually every one of the park's 20 miles of trails, I rode with my trusty 8x42s around my neck.

Whatever the season, Jefferson County's largest open space park (nearly 4,000 acres) seldom disappoints. In fact, my fondness for White Ranch seems to grow with every outing – and there are many to choose from.

Treks through White Ranch often begin at the east (lower) entrance off 56th Avenue, just a mile west of Highway 93, the scenic "back way" between Golden and Boulder. Starting at nearly 6,200 feet elevation, Belcher Hill Trail runs all the way to the west (upper) end of the park (max elevation 7,860 feet). Along the way, other trails with names like Mustang, Maverick, Sawmill and Rawhide branch away to other destinations. Another trail, the Longhorn, is a one-way route reserved for bicycles. That's a good thing, too, as White Ranch is popular with mountain bikers, who are required to yield to all other trail users. (Most are polite but not everyone complies.) In good weather, an early morning start is best to avoid traffic, though there's less of it on weekdays. But the birds don't care, and weekend or weekday, opportunities to see them can be superb.

Belcher Hill Trail, for instance, descends quickly into a lovely stretch of big cottonwoods, aspen, shrubs and scrub oak along Van Bibber Creek. In migration and summer, rarities invariably present themselves. But some of our loveliest birds are regular residents and nesters right there – Lazuli Bunting, Bullock's Oriole, all three grosbeaks, American Goldfinch, Western Bluebird, Yellow-breasted Chat. And more: vireos, flycatchers, warblers, hummingbirds, chickadees, woodpeckers, towhees, sparrows, accipiters and corvids. One of my purest summer delights is to watch a busy Bullock's sally forth repeatedly from a perch to hawk insects, then return to poke the bugs into the gaping mouths of two or three hungry offspring waiting on the fence. The simple charm of a male Lazuli singing from atop a scrub oak is another delight.

From that riparian trail, the foothills rise steeply to rocky ridges where Red-Tailed Hawks, Turkey Vultures, Common Ravens and Golden Eagles soar or occasionally perch on junipers or rocky outcrops. Across and above the creek, new habitat yields Mountain Bluebird and Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher in a profusion of wildflowers and flowering bushes. The climb eventually brings you to montane meadows and ponderosa woodlands, where Yellow-rumped Warblers proliferate, among Steller's Jays, Western Tanagers, Bushtits, Pine Siskins, and three kinds of nuthatches. At least once I've even seen a Northern Goshawk near the top. The possibilities keep me on my toes.

Continued on page 8

The winter “usuals” include juncos, jays, nuthatches, House Finches (also keep an eye out for Cassin’s, and Red Crossbills, too) and other year-rounders like siskins and Wild Turkey. In winter and early spring, snow, ice and mud sometimes force a closure of the east entrance. (This year it has been that way for weeks now, as that photo of an impatient me with the red “closed” sign shows!) When it’s that way, I start my birding at the western (upper) entrance, which is reachable from Colorado 93 via Golden Gate Canyon Road west (4 miles) and then north on Crawford Gulch Road for a few more miles until park signs lead east to the parking lot.

With so many wonderful places to bird around metro Denver, I admit to straying sometimes from White Ranch. But I recently recommitted to my beloved almost-backyard “patch” after learning that the lower part of the park is just inside my 5MR circle map. That’s short for 5-Mile Radius, an environmentally beneficial way for birders to explore what’s closest to home. (*Read Susan’s article about 5MR in last month’s issue of The Lark Bunting.*)

White Ranch also triggers waves of nostalgia when I recall hiking its trails over the years with our succession of golden retrievers – all trained to stop and sit patiently whenever I raised my binoculars! Soon I’ll be looking for a new four-legged companion to train and introduce to these trails. And just weeks from now, spring will be upon White Ranch, and with it, a more plentiful and colorful array of birds once more. Give me a call if you’d like an introduction or just some company on the trails of this JeffCo gem. I’m always game. But don’t forget to make sure that lower trail’s open first!



Spotted Towhee
Meg Reck



Lazuli Bunting
Jonelle Balais

History quiz – where/when was this photo taken?



While combing through the club archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, DFO historian **Kris Haglund** told us about finding this interesting photo with a connection to the Denver Field Ornithologists' early past.

At first, none of us knew a thing about it. Then we thought: Let's make a quiz out of this for readers of the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

So here it is, and the rules are simple: Tell us where and about when (more or less) that this photo was taken. Send your answer(s) to *The Lark Bunting* editor Patrick O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com. We'll award extra credit if you can identify any of the people in the photo.

Look for the answers and the winner in the May issue of *The Lark Bunting*. First correct reply by email wins a free bird-related book of the winner's choice from the information table in the lobby at the next DFO monthly program night.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 on March 20, 2020. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting is publishing monthly "Snippets from DFO's Past" – personal remembrances, member stories, bits of club history and trivia, and the like. If you'd like to contribute your stories, photos or memories to "Snippets," please send to TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955.*

DFO COMMITTEES

DFO needs YOU. . . to help plan our future!

Denver Field Ornithologists is enlarging its committees to improve and enhance club opportunities for members. Can you help? The more the merrier!

Unlike many bird-related organizations, DFO does its work without paid staff. We rely on the commitment of member volunteers. Committee work is not difficult or time-consuming. Each committee meets at least four times a year – occasionally more if there's a project or special task to perform. But you alone determine how much time you are willing or able to commit.

If you can spare a few hours here and there, we can use your interest, talent and enthusiasm for the DFO cause. The end result of committee work makes one of the best birding clubs in America even better.

All eight DFO committees – Membership, Conservation, Field Trips, Communications & Outreach, Finance, Grants Fund, Better Birding Skills, and Nominations – welcome interested volunteers. But two committees in particular can use new members right now:

Membership Committee

The DFO Board has adopted diversification of our membership as one of its strategic goals. So the Membership Committee seeks especially to reach out to new members between ages 18 and 55. This committee also keeps our membership rolls and runs the membership renewal program. If working on fresh ways to attract new members appeals to you, contact **Dave Hill** at d_d_hill@comcast.net

Conservation Committee

The club's new Conservation Committees seeks to help DFO fulfill its commitment to the protection of birds and their habitat in Colorado. It monitors topics of bird and habitat conservation in our state and region, and it advises the DFO Board and membership on issues that deserve the club's public support and involvement. If this vital role interests you, contact **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com

DFO NEWS

New website feature: DFO Conservation Corner

Conservation holds a vital place in the life of Denver Field Ornithologists. That word's close cousins "preservation" and "protection" are anchors in our club's bylaws, which commit DFO to promote "study and *preservation* of birds and their habitats" and to support "local and national movements for bird and habitat *protection* . . ."

With that in mind, our club's new Conservation Committee and the Communication & Outreach Committee have both been talking about providing members timely resources on this vital topic. The result is the [DFO Conservation Corner](#), a varied (and variable) collection of topical articles, studies, and other infolinks to help all of us keep abreast of conservation-oriented news, trends and fresh data.

You can find this new feature near the bottom of the [DFO website's](#) home page. It's just above the teal-green "CONTACT US" form. Click the "MORE" button under the DFO Conservation Corner heading and you'll go to a list of links to items ranging from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "10 Ways to Help Birds" to an article on an international partnership of scientists' "global roadmap to battle 'Bugocalypse.'" We intend to cover the gamut from birds, wildlife and landscapes to air, water and other natural resources and, of course, climate change.

Come back and visit often. As the weeks and months unfold, we will add to this compendium as fresh and compelling new resources arise. And if you encounter an article or study that you think deserves a place in our list, send the online link with a note saying why to **Susan Blansett** of the Conservation Committee (susanblansett@gmail.com) and **Sharon Tinianow** of the Communication & Outreach Committee (sharontinianow@gmail.com).

Big colonial waterbirds' return awakens DFO citizen science project

Patrick O'Driscoll

They're baa-aack . . .

Large, flamboyant and impossible to miss, several species of colonial waterbirds are returning to favorite communal nesting sites up and down the Front Range and eastern Colorado. With the return of the egrets, herons and cormorants that nest in our midst, another season of a "citizen science" project devoted to them is about to hatch.

The DFO Colonial Waterbirds Project enters its fourth year with a need for volunteers to help monitor nesting colonies in five metro Denver locations. Can you help? Visiting at least monthly (more frequently if possible), we count adult breeding birds, observe their courtship, mating and nesting behavior, and track their offspring as they fledge and leave in the fall. Best of all, participants can accomplish this task while birding at these popular locations.

The project aims to build a database with which to track population trends and the vitality of mass nesting sites that captivate human visitors, whether birders or not. Volunteers register on a free website, www.citsci.org, where we enter and keep the data and observations. There's even a cellphone app (kind of like eBird), though observers can also hand-write their data and observations to enter by computer later.

Our efforts since 2017 have focused on nesting communities of Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, and Double-crested Cormorants. We also keep an eye out for Cattle Egrets, known to have nested locally in the recent past.

The four main locations where DFO tracks these birds are familiar public parks and open spaces:

- Ferril and Duck lakes in Denver City Park and Grasmere Lake in Washington Park, both in Denver
- Kountze Lake in Lakewood's Belmar Park
- Tabor Lake in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt



Black-crowned Night-Heron Chicks
Patrick O'Driscoll

The fifth location is the Cherry Creek-Parker Water & Sanitation District's non-public ponds, where a small team of DFO members has private access.

The cormorants began arriving in early February. Already, more than 100 are settling in at City Park's Duck Lake. That island colony near the Denver Zoo will grow to several hundred adults and hundreds of nestlings and fledglings by mid-summer. Great Blue Herons also are setting up nest-keeping in other parks, and Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night-Herons will usually follow in late March and April.

Since 2017, we have collected an average of about 95 field reports a year from volunteer monitors at these locations. If you live near or enjoy going to one or another, please consider joining our effort.

The project keeps documents and an introductory PowerPoint on the [DFO website](http://www.citsci.org). On the home page, click "PROGRAMS & EVENTS," then scroll down to "CITIZEN SCIENCE" and click the "LEARN MORE" button. Then click "COLONIAL WATERBIRDS" to find the menu of background documents, the PowerPoint, and a "how-to" for joining the project.

For a taste of how a counting session goes, sign up for the DFO field trip on April 5 at Denver City Park, where trip leader and waterbirds program coordinator **Patrick O'Driscoll** will pay close attention to the park's nesting colonies of Double-crested Cormorants, Black-crowned Night-Herons and Snowy Egrets.

For more information or if you have any questions, contact O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com or 303-885-6955.

What we eat (and drink) matters to birds

Editor's note: In Denver Field Ornithologists' 85th anniversary year, The Lark Bunting is publishing a series that explores what conservation means to us – as a club, as birders, and as responsible citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. Each month, we address topics and issues in which personal action can help protect birds and their habitats.

Sharon Tinianow

What you eat matters to the birds. I know that sounds highly unlikely; we don't compete directly with birds for the wild grain, seeds, suet, or nuts they eat (not to mention worms, insects, lizards, amphibians or roadkill). But what you eat does indirectly affect the birds you care about. "Indirect" because there's not a simple cause-and-effect relationship. Bear with me and read on while I explain.

Consider the daily caffeine habit so many of us feed with coffee. Many of the songbirds we see and enjoy every year here in Colorado – warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks and more – migrate south to spend the winter in Central and South America, home to some of the world's top coffee-producing countries.

Coffee farms and plantations can be good habitat – or bad – for both migrant birds and those that live there year-round. It depends on how the coffee is grown. When first introduced to the Americas, coffee plants were a forest-floor crop, grown largely in the shade. Some coffee farms still use this traditional, rustic method, with decaying leaf litter serving as a natural fertilizer. Birds eat insect pests so pesticides aren't needed. Growers hand-pick the coffee berries, so only the ripe ones are harvested, which yields a better brew.

When the industry sought to modernize with sun-tolerant coffee varieties, it led to machine harvesting and higher yields. But it was costly for birds and their environment – destruction of forests and the use of chemical pesticides and

fertilizers to boost production. So our choice to consume coffee produced that way certainly matters to the birds. An alternate choice you can make is to buy "bird-friendly" coffee that meets strict requirements for how it is grown. But the dizzying array of names for coffee grown non-industrially – "shade-grown," "organic," "fair trade" and more – can confuse and mislead. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology website's "[Making Sense of Coffee Labels](#)" is a handy guide to making sense of what's good and better for birds.

But what about the food on your plate? That affects birds and all other living things, too. And when I saw this statement in an Audubon magazine article, "[The Low Carbon Diet](#)" by **Mike Tidwell**, I did a mental double-take:

What we put in our mouths now ranks up there with our driving habits and our use of coal-fired electricity in terms of how it affects climate change.

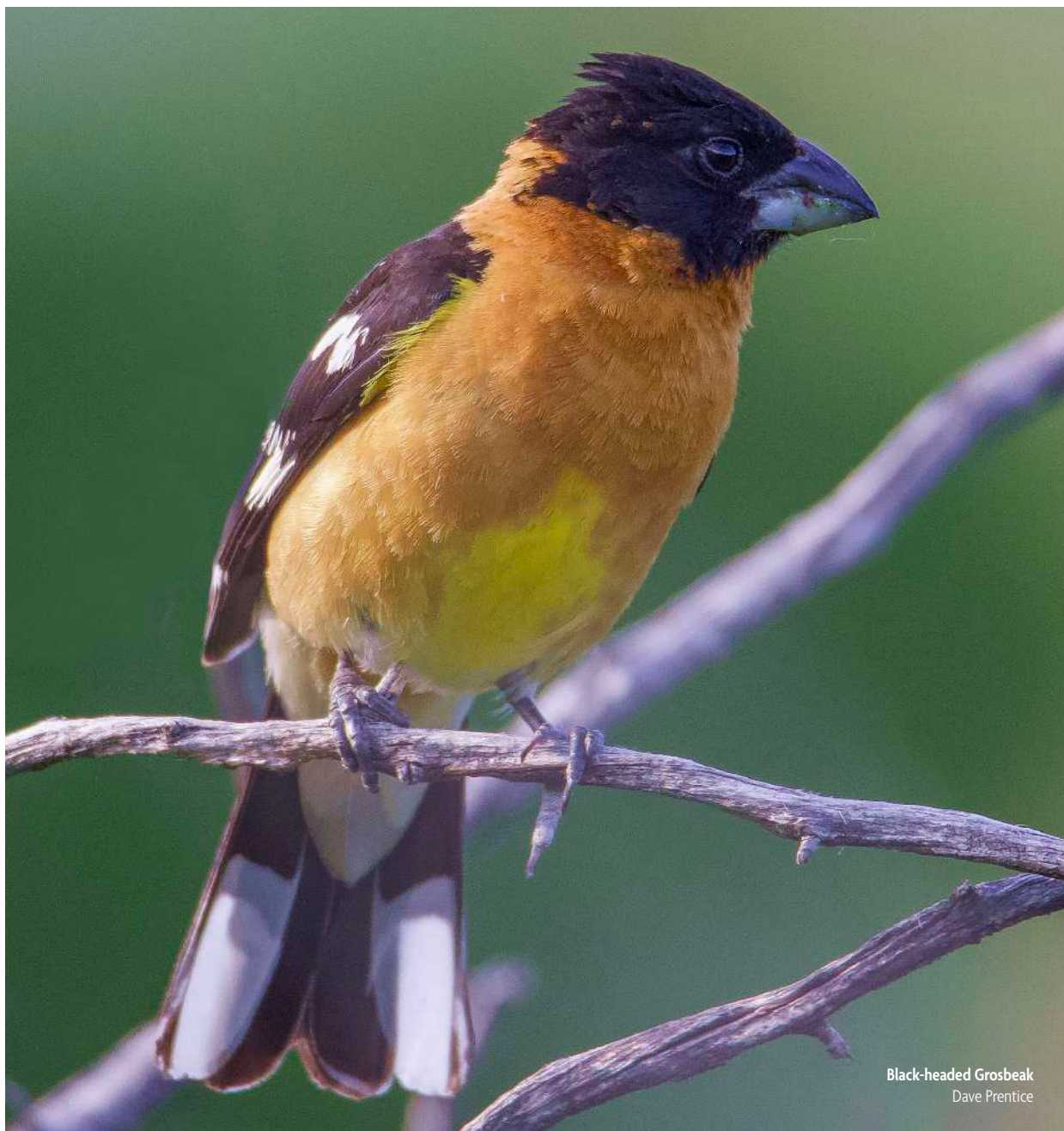
And climate change, as we all have heard, is already affecting bird populations around the globe. You've probably seen or read reports of the recent, heavily publicized study by the National Audubon Society that estimates two-thirds of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change.

The link here, of course, is that human production of the greenhouse gases that worsen climate change or global warming isn't just limited to the burning of fossil fuels to heat buildings, generate electricity and power transportation. Raising animals for food is incredibly energy intensive. More than half the grain grown in the U.S. goes to feed animals – not people. There's a lot of fuel, petroleum-based herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers embedded in your cheeseburger!

Meanwhile, when cows and other livestock eat and digest what we grow just to feed them, they generate powerful greenhouse gases, too: methane (23 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere) and nitrous oxide (296 times more powerful than CO₂). They burp, they pass gas, and they create a billion tons of manure a year. All that you-know-what accounts for 65 percent of nitrous oxide emissions caused by human activity.

What, then, can an eco-conscious, bird-loving human do?

Continued on page 14



Black-headed Grosbeak
Dave Prentice

20/20 VISION *cont from page 13*

If going vegetarian seems too daunting, I recommend the book, *Food Rules* by **Michael Pollan**. In this slender volume, Pollan outlines the benefits of reducing how much meat you eat to a level that shrinks your personal carbon footprint while still satisfying your inner carnivore. He calls it a “flexitarian” diet. He sums up his food rules with a simple, haiku-like statement:

Eat food. Mostly plants. Not too much.

Pollan points out that being mindful of your eating habits does double duty. Besides being better for your health, it's better for the birds and every other living thing with which we share this precious and beautiful planet. Whatever your preferences, taking the time to consider what reaches your table, and how it was grown, can begin to shift the balance toward a sustainable planet for all species.

Denver Field Ornithologists Inc
Profit & Loss
January through December 2019

	<u>Jan - Dec 19</u>
Income	
Direct Public Support	
Company Matching Funds	150.00
Individual Contributions	7,380.00
Misc Donations	582.00
Total Direct Public Support	8,112.00
Program Income	
Membership Dues	12,695.00
Program Service Fees	2,520.00
Total Program Income	15,215.00
Total Income	23,327.00
Expense	
Bank Fees	40.95
Contract Services	
Website Maintenance	2,000.00
Total Contract Services	2,000.00
Grants Distributed	6,500.00
Operations	
Layout Services	2,740.00
Printing and Copying	1,369.90
Software	14.99
Speakers Fees, Honoraria	2,371.50
Supplies	504.08
Website Hosting and Other	112.33
Total Operations	7,112.80
Other Types of Expenses	
Insurance - Liability, D and O	1,371.00
PayPal Expense	424.09
Sec'y of State annual filing	10.00
Total Other Types of Expenses	1,805.09
Travel and Meetings	
Conference, Convention, Meeting	402.00
Meeting room rental	2,006.25
Training	3,576.90
Total Travel and Meetings	5,985.15
Total Expense	23,443.99
Net Income	-116.99

Denver Field Ornithologists Inc
Balance Sheet
As of December 31, 2019

	Dec 31, 19
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
Denver Field Ornithologists Inc	
Endowment	2,945.17
Denver Field Ornithologists Inc - Other	35,175.37
Total Denver Field Ornithologists Inc	38,120.54
Total Checking/Savings	38,120.54
Total Current Assets	38,120.54
TOTAL ASSETS	38,120.54
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Equity	
Unrestricted Net Assets	38,237.53
Net Income	-116.99
Total Equity	38,120.54
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	38,120.54

APRIL FIELD TRIPS

Register for DFO field trips on the [website](#) or contact the leader directly. Bring binoculars, water, snacks and/or lunch, insect repellent, and hat/sunscreen. Dress for the weather. Directions and detailed descriptions of each trip are on the website. May field trips will be posted on the website on April 1. **Please be considerate and delete your reservation if you are unable to attend a trip for which you have registered.**

Running Deer Natural Area & Prospect Ponds (Fort Collins)
Saturday, April 4
6 AM - 2 PM

Chris Gilbert
Email: chrisgee9@gmail.com
Phone: 804-214-1508
Trail difficulty: strenuous

We will hike 6-7 miles on various trails in an area where good rare birds have been seen in the past. Bring lunch to eat on the go.

Pella Crossing Open Space (Boulder County)
Saturday, April 4
7:30 - 10:30 AM

Laura Steadman
Email: lauramsteadman@gmail.com
Phone: 843-319-5086
Trail difficulty: easy
Maximum participants: 10

Pella Crossing Open Space in Boulder County is a great place for an easy walk to look for waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and woodland species. We'll walk a few miles on gravel and dirt trails to greet spring. Field trip leader will have a scope, but feel free to bring yours, too.

Denver City Park (Denver County)
Sunday, April 5
7:15 - 11:30 AM

Patrick O'Driscoll
Email: patodrisk@gmail.com
Phone: 303-885-6955
Trail difficulty: easy

We'll focus on City Park's waterbird nesting colonies and check the rest of the park's hotspots for migrants and year-round residents. Expect to walk about 3 miles total. Scopes may be helpful to check cormorants' nesting progress.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams County)
Saturday, April 11
7:30 AM - 1 PM

Jill Boice
Email: jill@booksandcats.net
Phone: 303-863-7580
Trail difficulty: easy

We will start at Lake Ladora to check for waterfowl, then walk around the lake – about 2 miles on level gravel and dirt paths. We'll also check Lower Derby Lake from the observation deck and, possibly, the Wildlife Drive loop. Scopes helpful at the lakes.

Cherry Creek SP Wetlands Loop (Arapahoe County)
Sunday, April 12
8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Patrick O'Driscoll
Email: patodrisk@gmail.com
Phone: 303-885-6955
Trail difficulty: moderate

For DFO's 85th anniversary year, we have revived this monthly half-day of walking through most of the important habitats in Cherry Creek State Park. Ideal trip both for beginners and veteran birders. Expect to walk about 3 miles along level paths.

Joder Ranch (Boulder County)
Saturday, April 18
7 - 11 AM

Chuck Hundertmark
Email: chundertmark8@gmail.com
Phone: 303-604-0531
Trail difficulty: Easy
Maximum participants: 10

Expect to walk 2 miles in each direction – 4 miles total – as we search for a variety of foothills birds.

Chatfield State Park - Marina sandpit (Douglas County)
Sunday, April 19

7 - 11:30 AM
Gregg Goodrich
Email: gregggoodrich@gmail.com
Phone: 303-655-9135
Trail difficulty: easy
Maximum participants: 12

We will bird several locations on the Douglas County side of Chatfield Reservoir, scanning the water for waterfowl and hiking through the Plum Creek natural area.

Morrison Nature Center at Star K Ranch (Aurora/Arapahoe County)
Saturday, April 25

7 AM - NOON
John Breitsch
Email: jbreitsch@hotmail.com
Phone: 303-588-0552
Trail difficulty: easy

We will bird in a riparian system and should see a variety of birds such as Black-capped Chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and raptors. Portable toilets on site for the start of the trip. Indoor facilities will be available in the nature center at the end of the trip.

Chico Basin Ranch
Sunday, April 26
6 AM - 5 PM

Mark Amershek
Email: mamershek@msn.com
Phone: 303-329-8646
Trail difficulty: moderate
Maximum participants: 12

Chico Basin Ranch is a working cattle ranch in El Paso/Pueblo counties southeast of Colorado Springs. Driving distance from Lone Tree is about 100 miles. At the ranch we will drive on dirt roads, stopping to bird on level open areas at ponds, wetlands, and grasslands.



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email (legible) _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Sue Summers, 2364 W Costilla Ave, Littleton, CO 80120-3502

THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 56 | ISSUE 05 | MAY 2020

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring migration is on –
and so is coronavirus

DFO NEWS

Coronavirus + DFO:
Dealing now . . .
and in the future

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

Bear Creek Greenbelt,
Denver/Lakewood

DFO NEWS

Stay-at-home order?
Birding in the time of
COVID-19

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Mountain Bluebird

📷 Rob Raker

📍 Chatfield State Park, CO



Coronavirus + DFO: Dealing now . . . and in the future

Patrick O'Driscoll

Last month, the rapid spread of the new coronavirus brought all Denver Field Ornithologists in-person events and activities to a halt. Faced with rising concern over the pandemic of COVID-19 disease caused by the virus, the DFO Board voted March 13 to suspend field trips, evening programs, birding workshops and more through the end of April.

Then last week, with state and national authorities doubtful the outbreak will decline and pass before summer, the DFO Board voted to continue the club suspension through June 30. The board will revisit the issue the last week of April and each month thereafter for additional month-long extensions of the shutdown until safe and normal interaction can return.

As a result, more than a dozen March and April field trips and 17 May trips (May being the busiest month of spring migration in Colorado) are canceled, as will be 11 trips planned for June. "Birding is going to be a lonely occupation this spring," said **Karen von Saltza**, DFO director of field trips. She said that whenever trips do resume, expect the restart to be gradual and cautious, with smaller, closer-in trips at first.

"May is a big month for birding," von Saltza added, including DFO's own Spring Bird Count outings. This year the Colorado Field Ornithologists also scheduled their 2020 convention in Pueblo for May. Late last month, CFO had to cancel it; they plan to reschedule in Pueblo again for 2021.

DFO's activity shutdown also postponed programs scheduled for the regular fourth-Monday-night meetings in March and April. With the club's regular summer hiatus – no program meetings in May, June and July – that means our evening DFO gatherings will not resume until August at the earliest.

In addition to delays in "Better Birding" workshops and other activities, the continued suspension cancels DFO's annual summer picnic, which had been scheduled for June 14 at Prospect Park in Wheat Ridge.

Continued on page 3

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for August. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be made to the photo editor at jcasten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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As noted elsewhere in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*, the annual April election of new officers and board members this year will be via email voting, which will begin in a few days and run through April 27. DFO president **Dave Hill** plans to convene the DFO Board's quarterly meeting May 3 as a video conference with the Zoom computer app.

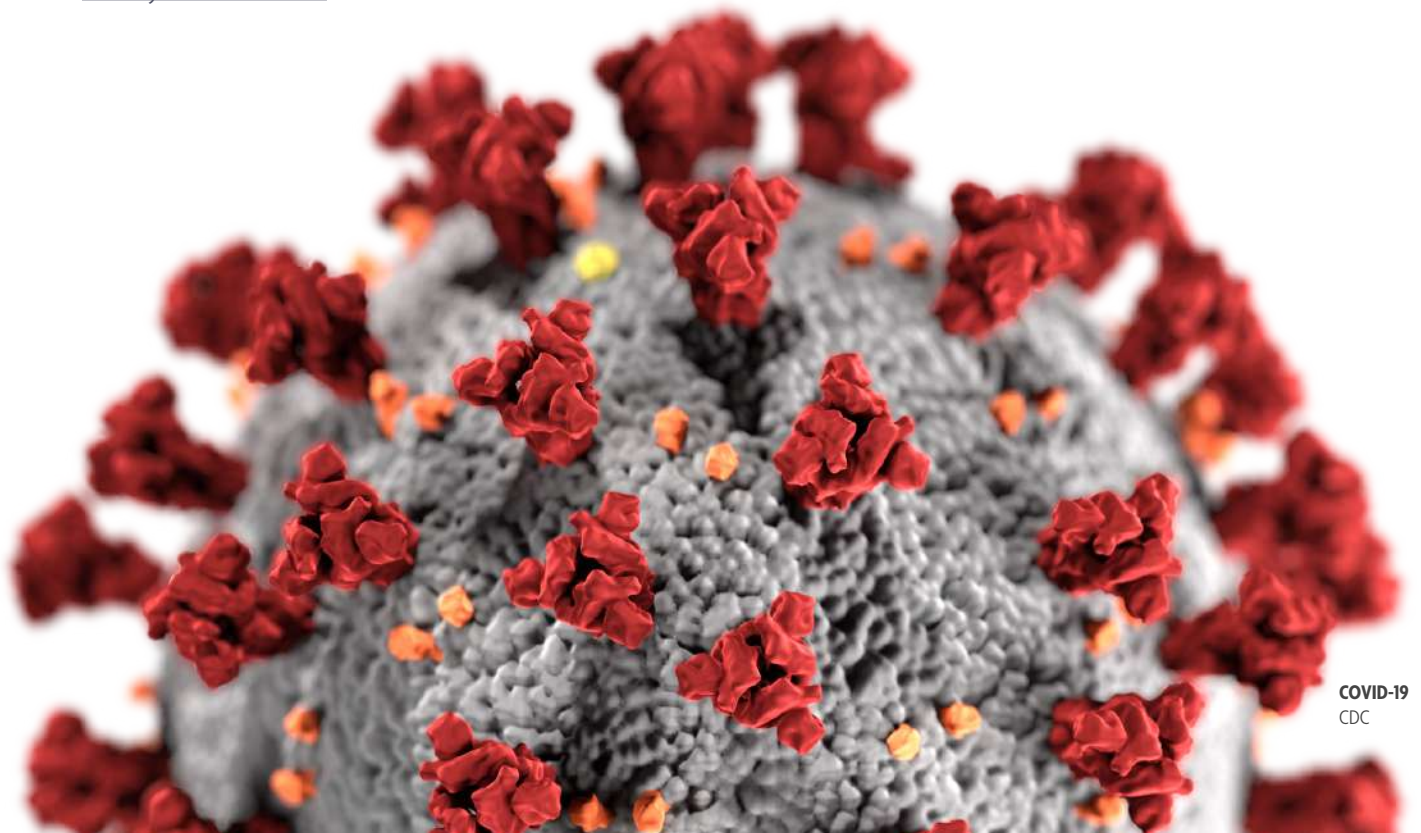
A few more particulars of DFO's holding pattern and the eventual way forward:

FIELD TRIPS – Von Saltza said that when DFO can again offer bird outings, it will do so with care and deliberation. When the DFO Board debated whether to suspend field trips, a big concern was about those that rely on carpooling to destinations farther afield, and the impossibility of maintaining “social distancing” for an hour or more inside the same vehicle. “At first we will probably offer trips with a maximum of six people only, out of an abundance of caution,” von Saltza said, noting the likelihood of lingering caution about larger gatherings. “No riding around in cars together. We will offer hiking and walking trips, but not trips that involve a lot of carpooling.”

She added that the Field Trip Committee continues to monitor the situation: “We’re just watching this and trying to be optimistic but prudent We will send out a blast (email to members) when things start to open up again.”

PROGRAMS – DFO Program chair **Bill Turner** has rescheduled the postponed March and April presentations. Now planned for Aug. 24 (assuming gatherings are deemed safe again by then) is the original April 27 program, “Challenges to Colorado Nesting Bird Populations,” with **Steve Jones**, Boulder environmental consultant and author of books on birds and wildlife. (Members may recall Jones’s previous program on Nebraska’s Swan Lakes in February 2019.) Rescheduled for Oct. 26 is the postponed March 27 talk, “Falcons: Streamlined for Speed,” with veteran wildlife photographer **Perry Conway**. Upcoming topics on dates not yet determined include a program on planting native plants beneficial to birds, and a talk by **Garth Spellman**, curator of ornithology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

Turner renewed his invitation for future program ideas from DFO members: “I try to strike a balance among various topics including reports of field trips in the U.S. and abroad, research results, conservation, bird behavior, and education, among other subjects. I welcome any suggestions people might have as to future speakers and topics.” You can reach him at toursbyturner@aol.com.





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring migration is on – and so is coronavirus

Dave Hill

What a difference a month makes. When I last wrote to you in this space, Colorado's winter resident birds were still among us. The sun was still setting before 6 p.m. And only a week or so before, the U.S. had recorded its first death, on Feb. 28, from what seemed a distant threat – COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

A month later, how things have changed. Spring migration has begun, as evidenced by our many first-of-season bird sightings. Sunsets in Daylight Saving Time now push to 7:30 p.m. and beyond. And day and night, rain or shine, we now live under the shadow of a global pandemic with more cases in the U.S. than anywhere else. Even though COVID-19 seems mostly to target older people and those with underlying medical conditions, anyone can get it. And none of us is immune to the unease and the disruption to life and livelihood.

Besides turning everything else in our lives upside down, the outbreak forced Denver Field Ornithologists on March 13 to suspend all in-person club activities. The DFO Board voted initially to put on hold all field trips, monthly evening programs, Better Birding workshops and more through April.

Unfortunately, by the start of April, it was clear the pandemic may last much longer than first thought. So last Friday, April 3, the DFO Board voted again to continue the suspension through the end of June. The board also voted to revisit this issue the last week of April, and of each month thereafter, to further postpone in-person DFO activities if needed until the return of safe and normal interaction.

We regret that this has sidelined the fellowship we all love. But we know our initial abundance of caution in March against the spread of the virus was the right thing to do. Staying safe and healthy until the pandemic passes was the aim then, and it is now. Thanks for your understanding.

While we wait and watch, there are still ways now for you to participate “virtually” as a DFO member:

ELECTION: COVID-19 precautions canceled our planned April program meeting, when we would have elected new officers and board members. So this year, we will vote by email instead – and there's still time (April 10 deadline) to nominate yourself! See the DFO election story elsewhere in this newsletter for election details

SOCIAL MEDIA: DFO's social media platforms are the places to share and enjoy our birding pastime together online. I encourage you to visit, “like” and use DFO's [Facebook page](#) to relate experiences, comment, interact and share snapshots from your birding outings. If you use the popular photo app Instagram, follow DFO! DFO's [Instagram page](#) is a fine way to enjoy sterling bird photography and keep abreast of DFO programs. Submit your own photos, too. (The [Instagram article](#) in *The Lark Bunting* last month tells you how.)

WEBSITE: Last year, DFO's website was handsomely redesigned. Even with events and field trips on hold, <http://dfobirds.org> remains a great resource and source for news, rare-bird updates and more

Most of all, you can continue to enjoy birding at home, in your yards, and, with all recommended precautions and “social distancing” measures, in your local parks and open spaces. (See *related article in this issue about birding and COVID-19*.)

We can look forward to the day when our club activities return – and with them, the personal fellowship, friendship and field pursuits that have brought us together as birders and DFO members. Until then please continue to stay safe, look out for each other, and keep enjoying the pastime that unites us.



BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

Bear Creek Greenbelt, Denver/Lakewood

Max Miller

Since I began birding a few years ago, I've been devoted to birding close to home. In fact, noticing birds near where I live along Bear Creek is what attracted me there in the first place.

Checking the mailbox one evening, I recognized for the first time the distinctive rattle-call of the Belted Kingfisher from the creek corridor. Another time, over a period of days, I worked out the ID of a Pied-billed Grebe as it lingered in the local beaver pond. Still another evening, I heard the mating-duet calls of a pair of Great Horned Owls that live in the greenbelt. Each experience was a revelation that I was part of a wider and far more diverse community along the creek than I had previously suspected.

"Bear Creek Greenbelt" can generically refer to a group of parks and greenspace along Bear Creek, from below the dam at Bear Creek Lake Park in Lakewood all the way downstream to where it joins up with the South Platte River in Denver. The piece I spend the most time in is between Estes Street and Wadsworth Boulevard, unofficially referred to as the Stone House Park. This park features a mix of habitats, including riparian cottonwood-willow forest, cattail marsh, two man-made ponds and a few beaver ponds, as well as shrubby grassland.

Late fall and winter are perhaps my favorite seasons in the greenbelt, as there are fewer people around, and a number

of delightful birds are more plentiful. It makes for a peaceful environment to observe the Dark-eyed Juncos that arrive with the shorter days, the occasional Mountain Chickadee I would otherwise have to travel farther up the canyon to spot, and the American Dipper, one of my favorite birds, sometimes spotted under the overpass bridges when winter cold really sets in. Other winter passerines I enjoy in the park are the Townsend's Solitaires that sometimes inhabit the patch of junipers on the north side of the park, and the Northern Shrike that has become fairly reliable November through March. Great Horned Owls are the undisputed celebrity birds in this park and throughout the greenbelt. Even non-birder passersby ask the same familiar question on any given winter day: "Have you seen the owls?"

Spring brings the influx that birders live for, though perhaps on a smaller scale here than other nearby spots. Yellow-rumped Warblers are ubiquitous for a few weeks, as are smaller numbers of Warbling Vireos. Some of the more memorable spring migrants I've spotted as they come through this park include Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, and Eastern Kingbird. And I can still remember clearly the morning I scanned the sky and spotted a Broad-Tailed Hawk circling very high overhead.

In summer, I've counted six species of swallow in the park, though Barn, Cliff, and Violet-green are the most common and abundant. Some years, Cliff Swallows even nest up under the Wadsworth bridge – the evidence of past nesting seasons remains there for all to see. Yellow Warblers and House Wrens compete for the most common song you hear at the beginning of summer. I regularly spot my favorite buteo, the Swainson's Hawk, here during the summer months until they all depart in mid-September for the pampas of Argentina.

Throughout the year I can find Song Sparrows, Northern Flickers, Black-billed Magpies, American Crows, and so many other common Colorado resident birds. Although they are familiar and so is the park, for me this means more leisure to observe their behavior. When I bird in other places, I'm often more list-focused, as I'm visiting to observe specific species. Here in the greenbelt, I rarely have such specific hopes or expectations, so I have time to enjoy such revelations as the American Kestrels that hover over the park's grassier open flats as they hunt grasshoppers and voles. With Mallards so

Continued on page 6



Belted Kingfisher
Jim Esten

abundant along the creek, I can pause to note and appreciate their mating displays, the subtleties of which I learned at a recent DFO evening program about Colorado's waterfowl. The greenbelt is also where I learned first-hand about the seasonal variance in flocking behavior, particularly in winter, when you can often see at least one Downy Woodpecker and a White-breasted Nuthatch or two in a mixed flock with any group of chickadees.

And my enjoyment of Bear Creek has gone beyond merely all things avian. Last year, inspired by what I learned in a DFO seminar on birds' relationships with trees, I went out into the greenbelt with a newly purchased field guide and identified willows, box-elders, elms, and other trees for the first time. Along with some self-study on other plant identification, this promises to open up my knowledge of the terrestrial ecology of the park even more. This year I have also taken up fly-fishing with my father, which I'm already learning is a great way to get clued into the aquatic environment as well.

The best part of all this is that the greenbelt is literally in my backyard. I have only to walk out my apartment door, and I'm catching up with the latest goings-on in my natural surroundings. An old mode of experience – I'd argue a lesser mode – yields to one of deeper knowledge. It is here, close to home, that I find the freedom to truly pay attention and gain with each visit a greater understanding and awareness of the wider ecological community I inhabit.

.....

Have you adopted a local birding spot that has become your own "home patch"? Please share! Each month, The Lark Bunting plans to feature DFO member stories about the places they come back to again and again.

*If you would like to write about YOURS, email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!*

Stay-at-home order?

Birding in the time of COVID-19

Patrick O'Driscoll

On March 25, Colorado Gov. **Jared Polis** issued a statewide “stay-at-home” order to help stem the person-to-person spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. He set the order to remain in effect at least until April 11 (and probably longer).

Does this mean DFO members and other birders can only watch our feathered friends in our yards or out our windows? Not necessarily, but . . . it's complicated.

Technically, the governor's order, and an accompanying public health order, allow Coloradans to conduct “necessary activities” away from home, one of which is “engaging in outdoor activity” and recreation – as long as it observes minimum 6-foot “social distancing” and other precautions. By the public health order's definition, that can include walking and hiking in “local areas” and even visiting state parks still open to public use.

But some jurisdictions, including the City and County of Denver, restrict residents to such activities only inside the city. And in public comments about a week after issuing his order, Polis emphasized that people shouldn't be driving at all except for critical activities such as work, groceries, medical visits and emergencies.

A lively debate soon unfolded on the Colorado Field Ornithologists' “[cobirds]” email forum about what “local” birding areas are (and are not) and the ethics of “chasing” rare species reports beyond one's own neighborhood or community. One version of “common sense” for birders is to heed the state orders and bird only in our yards, neighborhoods and our local parks, open spaces and eBird “hotspots” within walking distance or a short drive or bike ride inside our hometown, city or county.

However YOU define or interpret it, remember: ANY birding activity beyond your door is expected to follow

commonsense COVID-19 public health precautions AND to respect any closures instituted by state or local authorities. (And don't forget a cloth mask or bandana for your face, as the governor also recommended just last week.)

For the record, the governor's executive order let the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment define allowable “necessary activities” away from home. These include obvious categories such as critical emergencies, health care and government services, “essential” jobs, grocery shopping and walking the dog. But the department's “Updated Public Health Order” (PHO) also broadly defines “engaging in outdoor activity” under which birding is permitted (**boldface** added for emphasis):

*Engaging in outdoor activity, such as, by way of example and without limitation, **walking, hiking, nordic skiing, snowshoeing, biking** or running. For purposes of outdoor activity, **State parks will remain open to the public** to engage in walking, hiking, biking, running, and similar outdoor activities but all playgrounds, picnic areas, other similar areas conducive to public gathering, and attended areas shall be closed. **For other parks, check with the local jurisdiction and follow any requirements for that jurisdiction.** Additionally, the permitted outdoor activities in this PHO do not include activities that would violate the Social Distancing Requirements . . .*

Add to that one more obvious caution: If you're feeling ill or have a fever, do NOT go outside. Follow the other precautions and steps widely circulated about what to do if you think you may have been infected.

You can read about that, as well as the Colorado orders mentioned above, at the state's official website for the coronavirus response, <http://covid19.colorado.gov>.

Good birding to all – but careful, safe and lawful at all times.

For 2020, DFO's e-election is via e-mail



Bea Weaver

The shutdown of public events across Colorado and the nation because of the COVID-19 pandemic means the annual election of Denver Field Ornithologists officers and board members will be by email this year. Normally we vote in person at DFO's annual meeting the last Monday evening of April, but this year's April 27 gathering was canceled.

Instead, the DFO Board approved the use of Survey Monkey, an email-based app that conducts voting via survey over the internet and automatically calculates the results.

On March 26, all DFO members received an email listing candidates nominated by the board and inviting any interested DFO members to nominate themselves for office or board seats. The deadline for nominations is next **Friday, April 10**. The DFO Nominating Committee also still seeks candidates for the office of secretary, whose role includes keeping official minutes of quarterly board meetings. (All nominations and any questions should be directed to **Bea Weaver**, Nominating Committee chair, at beamiami@aol.com or 305-498-5935.)

Soon after April 10, all DFO members will receive an email with voting instructions. Voting will continue through April 27.

Here is background information about those already nominated for DFO offices and board seats. Most of these candidates are members of the board whose terms expire this year. They are willing to continue to serve in their current roles.

DFO OFFICERS

(1-year term)

President: Dave Hill

DFO president since 2019, Dave grew up in Illinois and graduated from Southern Illinois University. He also was DFO vice president in 2018-19. He was a career chemistry and

computer business educator in the Aurora Public Schools. He also was the assistant at Denver Audubon's Pawnee Grasslands Institute and served on Denver Audubon's board of directors. An Audubon master birder and Hawk Watch observer, Dave has attended Audubon's Beginning Birding Class 10 times! He also helped direct Audubon's Master Birder program. Dave is the father of two and an avid cyclist and skier.

Vice President: Susan Blansett

DFO vice president since 2019, Susan joined the DFO Board in 2016. She has served as Nominating Committee chair, organized two board retreats and member surveys, served on the Communications & Outreach Committee, and was interim chair of the Conservation Committee. She is a self-employed fundraising consultant in economic development, working from her home in Golden.

Treasurer: Sue Summers

DFO treasurer for the past 4 years, Sue was born and raised in the Seattle area, where she first became interested in birds. She joined DFO soon after moving to Colorado 7 years ago, and her career in financial services brought her to Denver. Sue has enjoyed serving on the DFO Board and looks forward to continuing her service.

DFO DIRECTORS

(3-year term)

Director: Mary Cay Burger

Mary Cay has been Chair of the Membership Committee and would continue to represent this committee on the board. She has been a member since 1995, and has served as president and vice president, membership director and field trip scheduler and leader.

Director: Roger Koester

A DFO member for two years, Roger is chair of the Finance Committee. In his career, he worked in student financial aid

for several universities, and he was active in national, state, and regional professional associations, where he served as a president, board member, and finance chair. Roger looks forward to serving DFO.

Director: Sharon Tinianow

Chair of DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee, Sharon took up birding while taking an ornithology class at Kent State University. She moved to Denver in 2012 and is special projects manager at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History. During her first term on the DFO board, Sharon was editor of *The Lark Bunting*.

Director: Bill Turner

A birder for more than 45 years, Bill is DFO's program chair and a member of the Nominating Committee. He worked at the Denver Zoo for 21 years, most of it as head of the education department. A longtime DFO member, he has birded on six continents. Bill wants to further DFO's mission of promoting interest in the study of and preservation of birds and their habitats, with special interest in conservation.

The following DFO directors are not up for election this year. Their three-year terms do not expire until 2021 or 2022:

Karen Drozda (2021)

Chris Goulart (2022)

Patrick O'Driscoll (2021)

Bea Weaver (2022)



Gray Catbird
David Prentice

Connecting the dots between birding and gardening

This is one in a series of monthly articles dedicated to exploring what conservation means to DFO – as a club, as birders and as citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. Birding with 20/20 Vision aims to inform and inspire us to do more to protect birds and their habitats. Have an idea for this series? Send it to Susan Blansett at susanblansett@gmail.com.

Deborah Lebow Aal

What you do in your yard can either support birds, or not. And, if you are supporting birds, you are likely supporting the entire ecosystem, including you and the humans you care about the most.

If you are reading this, you are likely a birder. I am not. I am a gardener – a gardener who gardens to bring birds, butterflies and insects to my yard. In fact, I go out in my garden looking for insects rather than flowers. The presence of insects means that I am gardening in a way that supports the whole web of life, not merely the parts that give me pleasure. Not too long ago, I learned about the inextricable links between plants, insects, and birds. It was a true “aha moment” for me.

Doug Tallemey, an entomologist, University of Delaware wildlife ecologist and author of many books, connected the dots for me. He writes of his observation of birds in his backyard and has since backed up his observations with scientific research. In a nutshell, to feed a clutch of Carolina chickadees till they fledge, the parent birds need to bring something like 9,000 caterpillars to the nest. I have to believe that our native Black-capped Chickadees in Colorado have a similar need.

Doug noted that his native oaks support more than 530 different species of caterpillars. His non-native Ginkgo trees support only five. And most birds must feed their young caterpillars or soft-bodied insects. Fewer caterpillars equals fewer baby birds surviving to fledge.

So, we can garden for only beauty, or we can garden for beauty and the food web. You can, of course, put out

birdfeeders and birds will find you. But a much better way to serve your bird population is to reduce your lawn area and plant plants native to the ecosystem that support caterpillars and other insects. A lawn of turf grass is pretty much like putting out plastic food for birds, butterflies and other wildlife (unless your goal is to attract Canada Geese to your yard). And those boxwoods, burning bushes, and other exotics – they are to the food web what plastic is to our diet.

So, what plants should you plant? You can go to the National Wildlife Federation's [Native Plant finder](https://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder), put in your zip code, and it will tell you how many moths and butterfly species are supported by particular native plants in your ecosystem (See <https://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder>). In my zip code, two of the best plants are Goldenrod (there are several species in the genus *Solidago*), which supports 56 caterpillar species. And no, it does NOT contribute to your allergies. That would be sneezeweed, which blooms at the same time. Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) is another excellent choice, supporting 221 caterpillar species.

There are many resources available for gardeners about which native plants support which birds. These lists generally focus on supporting adult birds, which is also important. For example, the [National Audubon Society website](http://www.audubon.org) states that Showy Milkweed, an important native plant in Colorado, attracts the Rufous Hummingbird; Flowering Dogwood attracts Wood Thrush; and Douglas Fir attracts Western Tanager. This list is far from complete. There's far more information at www.audubon.com than can fit in this article. But to really support birds, you need to consider all stages of a bird's life. Nestlings need the protein they get from insects and that is why you should pay attention to the insect-plant connections.

In addition to supporting the birds you care about, planting native plants provides many other benefits. Natives promote biodiversity, need less fertilizer, do not require pesticides, need less water in most cases, all saving you money in the long run. To me, it makes common sense to practice gardening for more than beauty. Try gardening with nature, instead of fighting her. I can almost guarantee that you will have more wildlife, including birds, in your yard.

***Deborah Lebow Aal** is a member of DFO and is a board member of Wild Ones, Front Range Chapter, an organization that educates and promotes native plants in yards and public spaces.*



Bird Garden (wildflower front yard)
Deborah Lebow Aal

DFO history quiz ANSWER!

Where and when THIS photo was taken



Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 in 2020. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting is publishing monthly “Snippets from DFO’s Past” – personal remembrances, member stories, photos, bits of club history and the like.

Drum roll, please! The votes are in, the suspense is over. Who won the history quiz in last month’s issue of *The Lark Bunting* to name where and when this photo was taken?

The winner is . . . **NO ONE!** Not because of wrong answers, but we because we received ZERO replies to this history quiz photo challenge. That’s right, fellow DFO’ers: Either no one knew the answer, or no one tried to find out.

But we still love this photo, and so we are happy to share the details, thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund**, who found them in the Denver Field Ornithologists archives at the Denver

Museum of Nature & Science. Actually, this snapshot in time came to our attention after longtime member **Bob Righter** wrote his own “Snippet” for the February issue of *The Lark Bunting* about one of the people in this 67-year-old snapshot.

This photo was taken at **Barr Lake in 1953**, during a field trip of the Colorado Bird Club, which would rename itself Denver Field Ornithologists 11 years later. We know the identity of only one of the five birders in the photo. Longtime member **Ruth Wheeler**, a former club vice president and compiler of the Colorado Rare Bird Alert, is believed to be sitting at the bottom right, in the checked blouse.

Haglund says another longtime member, **Margaret Pritchett**, the club’s first secretary and a regular field trip leader, apparently took the picture. The view is southeast on Barr

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Northern Harrier female
Jim Esten

Welcome to new DFO members

Jeff Cole and family of Englewood; Liz Fasterling of Westminster; Anne Fiore of Longmont, and Ellen and Stephen Thompson of Highlands Ranch

SNIPPETS *cont from page 12*

Lake from the steep slope of the dam that defines the reservoir's north shore. In the distance above Ruth is the point where today's park boat ramp and fishing pier are.

Barr Lake was a frequent location for bird club outings in those days, and a far different place than it became 24 years later, when Barr Lake State Park opened in 1977. Birders probably visited *this* Barr Lake because suspect water quality attracted more birdlife.

The picture dates to what the park website's [history page](#) calls "the darkest chapter in the history of Barr Lake," the 1950s and '60s. "Located downstream from Denver, Barr was the unwilling recipient of Denver's untreated wastewater for over 70 years," the website notes. "In 1964 and 1965, clean water legislation and the flood of '65 literally flushed Barr Lake clean."

Today's lake lies in what was a natural depression on the Plains – a wallow and watering hole for bison, elk and pronghorn, which drew Cheyenne and Arapaho hunters through the mid-19th century. After settlers displaced the native tribes, early cattle ranchers grazed their herds there; it was even said to be a rest stop for cattle drives along the Goodnight-Loving Trail from Texas to Wyoming.

After the railroad came through in 1883, pioneer settlement boomed and the Burlington Canal was built to bring water from the South Platte River into the wallow. Oasis Reservoir stored water there to irrigate sugar beets and other crops. In 1908, Oasis Dam was built, combining with another small reservoir into what today is Barr Lake, named for one of the civil engineers who worked on the railroad.

*Please share YOUR DFO history "Snippets" stories, photos or memories from ANY era, 1935 to now. Send to TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955.*



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

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THE LARK BUNTING

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

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For the Birds:
Denver teen aids rare
species with his avian art

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Cedar Waxwing

📷 Jim Esten

📍 Denver, CO





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Taking care in this time of isolation

Dave Hill

Hello again, fellow DFO members! I am writing this on the first Sunday of May, the month we all look forward to for peak spring migration of birds through Colorado. This afternoon the DFO Board held our quarterly meeting. We did so with a successful first use of the Zoom videoconferencing service, so vital to so many for maintaining contact and conducting business in this time of isolation.

As the weather warms, many of us remain in the shadow of the continuing threat of Covid-19 and the coronavirus that causes it. A number of you have managed to go out safely and responsibly to enjoy our birding pastime, protecting yourselves and others around you with “social distancing” and other recommended safeguards.

As you probably have seen, some people are now venturing out in larger numbers and groups, despite “safer at home” guidance. DFO is grappling with this issue. How much longer until we can return to group birding outings? When we do, how will we keep our members safe? While we don’t have the answers yet, we are working to bring Denver Field Ornithologists through this uncertainty safely.

We know how you love DFO field trips, and getting back out on the trail together is high on everyone’s list. The decision about when to bring field trips back is being made on a month-to-month basis by the DFO Board. Currently, field trips are canceled through June. Later this month, we’ll consider whether to restart in July or continue with cancellation. If we do restart – a big “if” that depends on how current efforts go in reopening public life in Colorado – trips will be reconfigured. At first, they will be in smaller groups and closer to home, with all recommended physical safeguards, including no carpooling. This will also mean face masks or coverings for everyone. Wearing them is recommended everywhere, and is even required in some instances in some of our most-visited birding locales, including Denver, Boulder, Boulder County and Wheat Ridge.

We are also actively discussing the return of DFO’s Better Birding workshops and of our monthly evening programs via videoconference and webinars. Expect to hear more about this as we work through the details.

As your club officers, board and committees work to draft a new DFO normal together, I ask you to continue being responsible individuals. Consider your personal safety whenever birding, and remember the safety of those you have at home. Follow the rules and the guidelines, whether required or not. Remember: the birds will come, and go, and come again – and so will we.

Drop me an email if you have questions, concerns or suggestions, or if you just want to rant. You can reach me at d_d_hill@comcast.net. We were in this together before. We’ll be in it together after, too.

Safe birding!

DFO's first remote election a success

Bea Weaver

Denver Field Ornithologists officers and board members have been re-elected via an online service after the Covid-19 pandemic forced cancellation of the club's annual April in-person election meeting. The election began after a nomination period that ended on April 10. Members then had through April 27 to cast their ballots electronically.

With tech-savvy help from DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee, a nominated slate of officers and directors was elected using Survey Monkey, the online survey development software. About 140 members – far more than normally vote at the annual in-person elections – answered DFO's email invitation to cast their ballots by computer from the home during Colorado's "Stay at Home" quarantining period. This alternate workaround to conduct the election also allowed DFO to fill the vacant position of club secretary via an online nomination and board vote.

Re-elected to 1-year terms as DFO officers are President Dave Hill, Vice President Susan Blansett and Treasurer Sue Summers.

Re-elected to 3-year terms as members of the DFO Board of Directors are Mary Cay Burger, Roger Koester, Sharon Tinianow and Bill Turner. (Several other board members are in the middle of 3-year terms and so were not up for election.)

In addition, DFO member Peter Stoltz responded to the election survey and volunteered to serve as board secretary. A participant in DFO field trips and monthly meetings, Peter is an accelerator research physicist who works for Tech-X Corporation.

At its quarterly meeting May 3 via Zoom videoconference, the DFO Board invoked club bylaws for filling vacancies between elections to appoint Peter as board secretary.

Congratulations to all, and thank you to all the DFO members who voted, and who adjusting to the reality of Covid-19 social distancing. No doubt many who regularly attend the annual April election meetings missed the usual socializing around our in-person event.

Bea Weaver is chair of the DFO Nominating Committee.

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for August. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be made to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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Bea Weaver

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BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

Fairmount Cemetery, Southeast Denver

Karen Drozda

“Ewww! Cemeteries are *creepy!*” I have heard variations of that phrase for almost 25 years – which is how long I have lived across from Fairmount Cemetery in southeastern Denver. Over that time, I have enjoyed exploring the amazing birds and varied habitat in what, for me, is a huge backyard that happens to be filled with gravestones. Never once has that “creepy” factor crossed my mind.

Founded in 1890 on what was then the outskirts of Denver, Fairmount is second only to historic Riverside Cemetery along the South Platte River as the city’s oldest. With several historic structures on its shaded grounds, it is also the resting place of scores of prominent Colorado politicians and other famous public figures. Designed by the “father” of Denver parks – **Reinhold Schuetze**, who also laid out Washington and Cheesman parks – Fairmount encompasses 280 acres of groomed and ungroomed habitat.

The cemetery is also the largest arboretum in Colorado, which might help explain its appeal to birds. (The cemetery’s eBird list is up to 144 species, more than twice Riverside’s.) Schuetze planted more than 4,500 trees and plants on the grounds, including many eastern species such as White Oak and Sycamore.

A segment of the Highline Canal, along with the Highline Trail bike path, crosses through the south side of the cemetery.

For years, many species of waterfowl and occasional shorebirds populated the canal’s waters beneath a canopy of varied and majestic conifers. An understory of diverse plants and shrubs flanked the quiet waterway. Unfortunately, about a decade ago, the Denver Water Department began to cut off the flow through that stretch of canal, later stopping it completely. Deprived of life-giving water, most of the majestic conifers died and were cut down. On one of my DFO field trips through the cemetery, we were fortunate to enjoy a flock of Red Crossbills feeding on the cones in those old-growth evergreens before their demise.

Despite the canal’s decline, the seasons still bring many wonderful migrants through Fairmount, among them Townsend’s Solitaires, American Tree Sparrows, White-crowned and Chipping sparrows, and an occasional White-throated Sparrow. In winter, every variety of Dark-eyed Junco feeds on the seeds of the plants that have overrun the dry canal. For years, a family of five Spotted Towhees skulked under the juniper shrubs. Flocks of Cedar Waxwings squabble with the solitaires for juniper berries. Year-round, it is not unusual to find many Brown Creepers, White-breasted and Red-breasted nuthatches, Blue Jays and Downy Woodpeckers.

Nesting birds of prey – Red-tailed Hawks and Great-horned Owls – are a seasonal favorite. Pedestrians who visit the cemetery grounds are often intrigued to see me focusing in on these nests. If I have my scope sighted in, they get a bonus: I invite them to look at the birds up close.

The cemetery’s Austrian Pines have occasionally surprised me with an unexpected guest – the rare sighting of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Not unusual in summer are migrants such as Say’s Phoebe, Western Wood-Pewee, Plumbeous Vireo, Hermit Thrush, and Yellow, Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped warblers. And the cemetery’s Canadian thistles, once gone to seed, feed many American and Lesser goldfinches, House Finches and sparrows.

Dave Leatherman, the renowned Colorado bird and bug expert whose own home patch is Fort Collins’ Grandview Cemetery, once noted that amazing birds don’t “just fall out of the sky in cemetery habitats as some might think.” As Leatherman regularly proves, it pays to know your habitat in places like Grandview and Fairmount – when galls on leaves

Continued on page 5



Red-tailed Hawk
Karen Drozda

will burst open in the fall, which weed seeds bring in the most varieties of finches and sparrows, and when the diminishing Russian Olive trees will bear fruit. Watch the Black-capped Chickadees – they are the sentinels that lead the rest of the birds to where the most aphids congregate.

Probably the most tragic thing I have witnessed as a birder was when this human burial ground became a dying ground for birds in the early 2000s. The West Nile Virus, carried by mosquitoes when the Highline Canal still had water, killed many songbirds and others. The tragedy was compounded when Black-billed Magpies and American Crows flew in to scavenge the dead birds, which lined the bottom of the property fence. Then those scavenger birds all died there, too. That summer and into the fall, I witnessed the virus's toll daily when a city crew came to collect the carcasses.

And yet, this quiet place associated with death remains alive today with bird life. At last count, I have recorded 42 species

of birds on my Fairmount Cemetery list. If you're ever in the neighborhood, I invite you to take a stroll through this historic wonder and enjoy it as the remarkable birding sanctuary that I do.

Karen Drozda is a DFO field trip leader, board member and coordinator of DFO's Better Birding Workshop program.

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Have you adopted a local birding spot that has become your own "home patch"? Please share! Each month, The Lark Bunting plans to feature DFO member stories about the places they come back to again and again.

*If you would like to write about YOURS, email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!*

For the Birds: Denver teen aids rare species with his avian art

Patrick O'Driscoll

At the still-tender age of 15, DFO member **Ian Redfield** is all in for wildlife conservation. A self-taught artist from childhood who discovered birding in his pre-teens, Ian has combined creative talent and love for birds into a most adult vision. He works to protect, save, and restore rare wildlife – from giant, flightless parrots in New Zealand to Colorado's own very threatened Gunnison Sage-Grouse.



Cherry-throated Tanager
Ian Redfield

With help from understanding and supportive parents, the Denver teen decided a year ago to channel his drawing ability into high-quality note cards and sell them online. His “[For the Birds](#)” website markets “art to stop extinction” – 10-card sets featuring five critically endangered avian species that have caught his artistic eye. Those in his current line range from the colorful Guam Kingfisher and Cherry-throated Tanager of Brazil to the Philippine Eagle, White-bellied Heron, and the enigmatic Forest Owlet, a Burrowing Owl lookalike so rare it was presumed extinct until its rediscovery in central India in 1997.

Ian does this not just to publicize the birds’ precarious status, but to help fund their protection. His profits go to the [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#), a leading advocate for endangered species like those he draws. Here at home, he also works for birds as the youngest and newest member of Denver Field Ornithologists’ Conservation Committee.

“It’s called *For the Birds*, but it’s really just about conservation,” Ian said of his web venture. “I don’t really care if it’s a bird or a fungus – it’s alive, it has an impact in the world, and it requires respect.” He mentioned a particular favorite, the exceedingly rare [Kakapo](#), the largest parrot in the world. “It’s easy to go day by day by day without thinking about this large, flightless bird from New Zealand. But it’s Important to realize that what we do has an impact on it and everything else. It is our responsibility to take the initiative, to leave this earth better than we found it.”

How Ian gained his enthusiasm for nature is a familiar story. According to his mom, it runs in the family. “As a family, we are fairly worried about the state of our planet, and so he is definitely hearing our frustration,” said **Emily Minton Redfield**, who also serves as Ian’s bookkeeper, packing and shipping department. “The kids are the ones that have to clean up our mess, ultimately. We’re excited by the natural world and the culture of the world. My husband **Randall** and I are pretty avid travelers, and we wanted our sons (Ian has an older brother, **Jack**) to spread their wings and fly.”

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Reared on family hikes, nature TV, and travel, Ian bent toward birding at about age 11. On a family visit to The Broadmoor resort in Colorado Springs, “I was alone walking across those big meadows when I saw a bird that was just sitting down in the field, right in front of me,” he recalled. “Looking back now, it’s a ridiculously common bird. But it was completely stunning – the red cheek pad, the red chest and all that. It was like seeing a ridiculously amazing animal like a tiger, right in your back yard.” Later, he downloaded the Merlin bird ID app to learn it was a Northern Flicker. He scrolled through the app for “all those other birds in ‘your area.’ I wanted to see what those were, too.”

About the same time, Ian went away to a summer camp in Maine. One day the Camp Kieve kids took a day trip 15 miles away to visit [Hog Island Audubon Camp](#), the famous bird-focused nature center off the Atlantic coast. “It was my favorite day of the whole summer trip,” he said. “We saw some really cool birds. It was so amazing. I was super, super-excited.”

Upon returning home, Ian focused on birds on family hikes around Denver. “Ian has kind of brought us all on board with birding,” Emily said. “We really didn’t know what we were doing until he started teaching us. It’s crazy. We just went on a hike the other day, and when something flew by, he was, like, ‘That was a White-breasted Nuthatch.’ I said, ‘How did you even SEE it?!’ ”

Two years after his Maine experience, Ian returned to Hog Island for a summer seabird camp for teens. “It was the first time ever traveling outside Colorado just to go birding,” he said. “It was really helpful to be around other birders. At that point, I didn’t have anything like a birding posse or that sort of thing. I hadn’t learned about DFO. I birded by myself.”

Ian’s artistic skill and birding were coming together (he carried a sketchbook as well as binoculars). His mother also remembers a visit to [Nature’s Educators](#), the raptor-rescue and wildlife program in Sedalia, CO: “He was always drawing dinosaurs from a very early age, and drawing them well.” She said that when Ian told one of the bird handlers how into dinosaurs he still was, the handler replied, “Oh yeah, I had been into them, too, but then I got into school and decided it



Ian Redfield painting
Emily Minton Redfield

was a lot more fun to study things that were alive.” Emily said Ian “repeated that to me later,” an impression that reinforced his interest both in birds and in their ancient ancestors.

Ian traces his endangered-species focus to “looking up birds on Wikipedia and seeing their populations were dramatically decreasing.” He also credits a BBC documentary series, *Last Chance to See*, about critically endangered wildlife including Kakapos. He was moved by the unpaid volunteers working to conserve those rare parrots: “I’d never really seen ‘conservation’ before. I got butterflies in my stomach, jealous of those researchers there who stayed in a log cabin and got up at 4:30 in the morning to band and conserve the birds.”

From the start, he wanted to display his bird art online. “But he always wanted to give back,” said Emily. “With my husband, we talked about what could we do – T-shirts? Hats?” When we were batting around ideas, Randall mentioned stationery, cards, and the idea stuck. And I have a friend in the stationery business who helped us kind of lay it out.” Now Ian and his parents sit at the dining-room table to assemble note-card sets and fill online orders.

Continued on page 8



Ian Redfield
and Barn owl



Note card set
Emily Minton Redfield photos

Ian said he appreciates that they handle “the business side of things” so he can “think about the art and the message of conservation. I tend to get a little stressed out when they start talking about numbers, like \$600 to print these cards.” But they have already recouped nearly all their expenses with the current batch of cards.

“Assuming we run out of cards and need some more, I’ll probably start drawing a bunch more,” Ian said, though he hasn’t decided yet which species. He works in many media – pen, pencil, watercolor, acrylics. He even used digital illustration (“it’s like a big iPad”) to draw the Cherry-throated Tanager, a Brazilian species threatened by deforestation.

“Perhaps we’ve created a monster!” Emily said with a laugh, noting Ian’s appetite for more bird-oriented travel – “‘Can I go to New Zealand or South Africa?’” He has already been to a Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek outside the species’ namesake Colorado town. And in March, he came face-to-face, just 4 feet apart, with a wild Andean Condor, the largest flying bird on earth, while on a family trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. Ian said studying birds on family trips through the Americas and Europe “has helped me see the importance of biodiversity and conservation” of birds outside Colorado and the U.S.

Here at home, Emily said the family is “very grateful” to DFO and the birding community, “which seems to embrace Ian’s

passion and wants to further it.” Her son even acquired a birding mentor when she took him out of class one day to pursue the rare Purple-footed Goose that visited Colorado in winter 2018-19. “We came across this kind gentleman, **Charlie Chase**, who had the bird in his scope. He has been wonderful to help Ian expand his knowledge – and he gives us a break from taking Ian places to bird, since he doesn’t have his driver’s license yet.”

That can happen after Ian turns 16 this summer. Whether behind the wheel or not, he is already on his way. Ian’s other interests include playing the mandolin, Ultimate Frisbee, math, physics, and “just about anything that ends with an ‘-ology’ . . . except for Scientology – not that one!” he joked. “But birding and wildlife conservation is definitely my favorite thing to talk and learn about. It’s where I get the most enjoyment and fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment.”

For the Birds website: www.forthethebirds.world

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*This is one in a series of monthly articles dedicated to exploring what conservation means to DFO – as a club, as birders and as citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. Birding with 20/20 Vision aims to inform and inspire us to do more to protect birds and their habitats. Have an idea for this series? Send it to **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com.*

License to bird? You'll soon need one in Colorado SWAs

Patrick O'Driscoll

Beginning July 1, you will need a valid Colorado Parks & Wildlife hunting or fishing license to go birding in any of Colorado's 350 State Wildlife Areas (SWA). Originally catering to recreational hunting and fishing, these preserves of bird-friendly habitat have become increasingly popular for non-"sporting" pursuits, including birding, photography, hiking and more.



Unfortunately, SWAs have also become popular with less wildlife-friendly users. At the April 30 meeting of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission, CPW Southeast Regional Manager **Brett Ackerman** said the rule "is aimed at curtailing non-wildlife-related use of these properties." He presented examples from across Colorado of "detrimental" activities, including vandalism, temporary residential squatting on SWAs, driving vehicles through winter range for big game wildlife, and other disruptions. The board voted unanimously for the new requirement.

"We're not seeking to catch people off guard and write them tickets," Ackerman said. "We want to curtail non-wildlife use of these properties and return them to their original intended purpose . . . By policy, state wildlife areas are acquired with hunter and angler dollars, and are intended specifically to provide wildlife habitat and wildlife-related recreation."

Welcome to new DFO members

Cynthia Schuele of Arvada



Tree Swallow (Jim Esten)

The new policy also covers entry to State Trust Lands, which total nearly 3 million acres in Colorado. However, only about 20 percent of those lands (585,000 acres) are open to wildlife-related recreation. In addition, trust-lands access is typically open only between Sept. 1 and the end of February, a period that coincides roughly with Colorado's hunting seasons for game wildlife and waterfowl.

What will this new requirement cost? Much less than a state parks pass. Unless you already possess a Colorado hunting or fishing license, the simplest way to comply is to buy an annual fishing license. It costs about \$10 for age 65 and older, about \$35 for ages 18-64 and can be purchased in person or [online](#). CPW's website says license buyers under 65 also must get a \$10 [Habitat Stamp](#) that helps fund efforts to preserve and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

For the full text of the CPW news release about the new licensing policy, go to: <https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/News-Release-Details.aspx?NewsID=7346>



DFO'S 85TH BIRTHDAY:
SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

A field trip serenade and expert ID at Roxborough

Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 in 2020. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting is publishing monthly "Snippets from DFO's Past" – personal remembrances, member stories, photos, bits of club history and trivia, and the like.

Doris Cruze

In 1982, I was fortunate enough to be in the first group of volunteers trained to lead tours at the new Roxborough State Park. The park was still closed to the public as there were no facilities yet for visitors, and the entrance road still ran across private property. However, groups were welcome to come for guided tours by appointment.

As a newly minted park volunteer and a beginning birder, I volunteered to accompany a group from Denver Field Ornithologists, led by **Ruth Wheeler**. She assured me that all I needed to do was guide them through the park and they would identify whatever birds we found.

On the day of the hike, I drove to Chatfield SP to pick up the gate keys and the cash box. The DFO group met me at the first gate, and I sold passes to each carload, a \$3 fee. Unlocking the first gate, I waited as the group proceeded to the second gate. Once I had unlocked it, we moved through and then repeated the process at the third gate. Each time, I closed the gates behind us but did not lock them. We drove to the parking lot and began our hike on what is now the Fountain Valley Trail.

Ruth carefully recorded each bird sighting and kept the group moving. At the north end of the trail we paused at the run-down Persse place (the stone house and homestead named

for **Henry S. Persse**, who himself named Roxborough after the part of Ireland from which his family came). Out came water bottles and snacks as we relaxed. A gentleman named **Thompson Marsh** stretched out in the grass to rest, with his back to the old barns on the property. Suddenly there came a beautiful bird call, a series of tones from a sweet high note down the musical scale. It was the most wonderful bird call, and everyone froze to listen.

At that point, Mr. Marsh raised his arm and, pointing backwards without moving his head, said aloud, "Canyon Wren." As if on cue, the tiny singer repeated its lovely song.

Little did I know that Thompson Marsh was a legendary DFO birder. Tales of his exploits are still told today when longtime birders get together.

When we finished that hike, Ruth sat on a rock back at the parking lot to share the bird list with everyone. Today, not far from that spot, a memorial bench on the patio at Roxborough is named in her honor. And I'll always remember that tall man, stretched out in the grass, identifying a tiny bird by its song, without even looking.

Doris Cruze is a longtime member of DFO.

.....
Celebrate DFO's past, present and future!. Please share YOUR "Snippets" stories, photos or memories from ANY era, from 1935 to now. Email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!



PICTURE THIS: YOUR PHOTOS IN THE LARK BUNTING

We've asked you before, and we're here to ask again: Send us your excellent Colorado bird photos for *The Lark Bunting*!

For the high-profile cover of our monthly newsletter, we seek great photos – in color, nicely lit, sharply focused – of the birds we see in our state in the course of the year. Whatever the bird(s) or the situation, we'd love to see your shots. They could be the cover photo, or perhaps inside with an article that features your subject bird . . . or maybe just as a stand-alone photo.

Here are the particulars:

Photographers must be members of Denver Field Ornithologists (if you are not but want to submit, go to the DFO website's [membership page](#) first to join the club!)

Photographers are asked to submit original, unedited photo files – not yet sized or cropped. If you're not sure, contact **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, at jcesten@gmail.com and he can explain

Send your photos and your questions to photo editor Jim at the same address. Thanks!

DFO NEWS

Field trips and Covid-19: What's next?

Patrick O'Driscoll

With the slight easing of restrictions meant to keep the novel coronavirus and Covid-19 from overwhelming Colorado and its health care system, some businesses have begun to reopen, and some people are returning to work.

What Colorado's gradual shift from "Stay at Home" limits to cautious resumption of activity under "Safer at Home" means for recreation – including DFO field trips – is still unclear.

As DFO Field Trip Director and committee chair **Karen von Saltza** indicated in last month's issue of *The Lark Bunting*, field trips will be smaller, closer to home and with continued "social distancing," including physical separation and mandatory face masks or coverings.

The Denver Field Ornithologists Board of Directors has canceled field trips through the end of June and will decide at the end of May whether to resume trips in July or continue the month-by-month suspension that began in March. "I believe that reactivating the schedule should be done cautiously," von Saltza added. Restarting DFO outings in July or August at the earliest depends on whether Colorado's return to more public activity goes smoothly, without a "second wave" surge of new infections.

Whenever DFO does resume field trips, they will follow new rules:

- Six (6) participant limit per trip
- Each trip confined to a single, local location
- Participants required to wear masks/face coverings (recommended statewide and mandatory in certain instances in several cities and counties)
- Participants required to practice minimum 6-foot physical separation ("social distancing")
- No carpooling except members from same household

Von Saltza also said field trip leaders will continue to create and schedule trips each month, but they will not be activated, posted and made available for sign-up until there is a go-ahead to resume field trips. "It seems that ardent birders are getting out and observing social distancing while wearing masks. This seems to be an acceptable solution for the time being," she added.

"By taking these steps we protect ourselves and others," said **Gregg Goodrich**, who handles tech support for DFO's field trip program. He said he was encouraged when he encountered a number of other DFO members recently while separately visiting Harriman Lake Park to see "all the good warblers that are showing up . . . All (of us) were wearing masks and practicing social distancing."



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email (legible) _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
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THE LARK BUNTING

6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660





THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

No DFO field trips? Let's
STILL go birding

DFO NEWS

Bird in peace . . .
Robert A. "Bob" Spencer
(1924-2020)

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

Deer Creek Canyon Park
Jefferson County

BIRDING WITH 20/20 VISION

Conservation inspiration?
Look to like-minded
birders elsewhere

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Lark Bunting

📷 Patrick O'Driscoll

📍 Heron Pond, Denver





FROM THE PRESIDENT

No DFO field trips? Let's STILL go birding

Dave Hill

I hope you are all safe and well. Have you been getting outside? Are you birding? Let's go birding together!

OK, not *together*-together. But look what the combined efforts of so many Colorado birders in the field produced last month at the peak of an amazingly busy (and productive) spring 2020 migration. I know that birding can be kind of a pain in this time of Covid-19 – but one by one, we're finding a way, aren't we?

I've been birding sometimes by myself, but more often, I try to do so with a friend. We are careful. We keep the social distance. We wear the masks. Still, I find it difficult at times. The mask fogs up my glasses and muffles my voice, so I find myself pulling it down to my chin more than I should. I know that's a no-no, increasing the risk of catching the virus. I struggle with all of this. Do you, too? We're only human.

Then there are the times when my friend spots a bird whose exact location is not obvious. I circle around behind to get the angle of the sighting while listening to the directions. It's hard to do and still remain 6 feet apart, isn't it?

But I'm in that "at-risk" age bracket. I'd rather not imagine the consequences of getting the virus if I'm careless – and I'd rather not stop birding. So I'll be more careful.

As Colorado gradually "reopens" from the coronavirus shutdown, Denver Field Ornithologists will adjust its field trip protocols so we can bird together again, but in smaller groups at first. We'll travel alone, in separate vehicles. We'll wear the masks. We'll keep the distance. We'll heed Colorado's "Safer at Home" mandates.

But in the meantime, let's go birding, together apart! I tried a new location last week with almost no other visitors around. It was less than an hour's drive and empty of people – but not



of birds. I listed 35 species that day, a good day free of any worry about an outing somewhere busy and congested.

I've also found a great way to get inspired. All you need is your smartphone or computer. Go to a YouTube channel called ... you guessed it: "Let's Go Birding." It was co-created by our own **Megan Miller**, DFO field trip leader and Instagram director. Bird nerd Megan and her partner **Jordan Spalding** and their friend **Satoshi Machihara** (both film and editing wizzes) have posted three playlists of 15 *LGB* videos so far, with energetic and animated visits to familiar Colorado hotspots from the Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield State Park to Lower Latham in Weld County, as well as out-of-the-way spots with which you may not be familiar. Each episode offers birding tips for the location, interviews, and cool facts about Colorado species.

Go to their YouTube channel at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIglwKuxt6O-VJ-bt7SLlw>. Prepare to smile and laugh a LOT. It's great fun.

Take care and see you again in two months after *The Lark Bunting's* annual midsummer break. But if you have questions, concerns or suggestions as DFO members, I want to hear them and I'm always available.

You can reach me by email at: d_d_hill@comcast.net, or by phone at 303-870-4316.

Pandemic permitting, DFO programs could resume in August

When the Covid-19 pandemic forced Denver Field Ornithologists to suspend in-person club gatherings last March, two evening programs planned for March and April were postponed indefinitely.

Now, with efforts underway to slowly and safely “reopen” public life and activity in Colorado, DFO is rescheduling one of those programs for October, and working to line up new programs for August and September. Any presentations, however, are still subject to assurances that by then, pandemic recovery conditions can allow DFO to stage public gatherings again without threat of spreading the virus.

The postponed March program, “Falcons: Streamlined for SPEED!” with veteran wildlife photographer **Perry Conway**, is now set for Oct. 26. Conway is a freelance naturalist, photographer and CEO of the Aerie Nature Series of photographic and education programs.

Because of disruption by the Covid-19 shutdown, DFO is still seeking program topics and speakers for the scheduled Aug. 25 and Sept. 28 meetings. Meanwhile, members can enjoy the first-ever webinar sponsored by DFO – see the article by **Susan Blansett** on page 9 in this issue.

DFO evening programs are normally the fourth Monday of the month, January through April and August through December, with a summer break during May, June and July. Free and open to the public, they are scheduled for 7 p.m. at Unity Spiritual Center of Denver, 3021 S. University Blvd., Denver.



Shrike and prey
Dave Leatherman

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be made to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

Deer Creek Canyon Park Jefferson County

Bob Shade

I discovered Deer Creek Canyon Park as a birding site when some men in our church went on a hike there in 2015. You get there by taking Deer Creek Canyon Road west from South Wadsworth Boulevard (past Denver Botanic Gardens Chatfield Farms) for about 3 miles, then turning left (south) onto Grizzly Drive and following the signs to the park's spacious parking lot.

I love a glorious bright May or June morning, hiking up Meadowlark Trail with the sun behind me and camera in hand. The first half mile from the parking lot is grassland, but then it changes to oak-juniper woodland. On such mornings, I have to share the trail with many hikers and dog walkers, but that's OK: the birds seem habituated to the presence of all the *Homo sapiens*, and the dogs are always friendly. My theory is that this avian habituation offers more photographic opportunities of birds that are unafraid to "tee up" in the morning sun.

And where they tee up, the terrain is cooperative. The park foliage along Meadowlark is not that high and the slope from the trail is such that the birds' perches are at or even below eye-level. I find that the normally furtive and skulking Yellow-breasted Chat males I encounter are not shy about posing and singing for me. The juniper foliage offers a charming and

frilly background for bird photos with a nicely out-of-focus backdrop, too.

Also easily photographable from the trail are Black-headed Grosbeaks, Lazuli Buntings, Virginia and MacGillivray's warblers, Green-tailed Towhees, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Western Tanagers, and Lesser Goldfinches. Spotted Towhees, meanwhile, love the thickets of Gambel's Oak, and I am never out of range of their persistent song. The best photos I have taken of most of these species came from this location. Those of you who are not photographers will get excellent views of these birds and will have plenty of practice learning their songs. Such is the unexpected excellence of this not-so-ordinary park in the Jefferson County foothills.

If you take the hiking loop counter-clockwise, you will come down off the slopes to Plymouth Creek, which sustains large trees like Douglas Fir. You will hear and probably see Plumbeous Vireo at the creek. You might also hear singing Overbirds, apparently on territory right now, on the upper reaches of Plymouth Creek Trail and near the small pond on Red Mesa Trail.

In short, Deer Creek Canyon Park is a simple – and simply great – destination with reliable birdlife and agreeable scenery. A couple of hours will do it, unless the spectacular landscape of distant red-rock formations and surrounding mountains distracts you from your birding mission. Then again, you may spot a distant, soaring raptor while gawking at the view. The park's wildflowers are another pleasant distraction. Enjoy them. Enjoy everything here.

I only wish I could afford some of the large-acreage luxury properties along the east side of the park – then I'd have Deer Creek Canyon Park in view every day.

Yes, it's a great place!

.....

Have you adopted a local birding spot that has become your own "home patch"? Please share! Each month, The Lark Bunting plans to feature DFO member stories about the places they come back to again and again.

If you would like to write about YOURS, email TLB editor Patrick O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!

Bird in peace . . . Robert A. "Bob" Spencer (1924-2020)

Patrick O'Driscoll

Former DFO field trip leader and club president **Bob Spencer**, a retired printer, admired Colorado birder, and fervent gatherer of unusual collectibles since his Great Depression childhood, died on May 11 in Morrison, CO. A longtime resident of Golden until infirmity overtook his mobility in 2017, he passed peacefully while in recovery from a recently broken hip.

Bob Spencer was 96, but his enthusiasm for birds and birding was ageless. He died with a Colorado life list of 453 species, added to as recently as 2018. "Dad was a very avid birder since the early 1960s, and went out every Saturday that his work, family and church responsibilities would allow," said his namesake son, **Robert L. "Bob" Spencer**.

Growing up, Bob the younger had shunned his father's passionate hobby. But over the past decade, he and his wife **Sondra** caught the birding bug while chauffeuring his dad to Colorado rare-bird stakeouts (American Woodcock, Purple Sandpiper, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Tropical Kingbird) and on other bird outings. When Bob's need for a walker and then a wheelchair made outings on foot too difficult, his son took him on twice-monthly birding drives through Chatfield State Park and Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

"When we first started driving him, he really wanted to chase some good birds," Bob the younger said of his dad. "Not just go for a drive but go and hunt a bird. We're very grateful that in his later years we had the opportunity to spend time with him on these outings."

Bob Spencer joined DFO before it was DFO. In 1962, he rewarded himself for earning his bachelor's degree in business at age 38 after seven years of night school. "I graduated from DU and bought myself a membership in what was called the Colorado Bird Club," he recalled in a 2007 interview with Colorado Community Newspapers. "Some days we would go out and see 100 birds a day."

In September 1965, after the club became Denver Field Ornithologists, Bob's name appeared in the first field trip report printed in Vol. 1, No. 1 of the DFO newsletter, *Monthly Report of Field Observations*. Led by **Nancy Hurley**, nine members including Bob recorded 30 species in Rocky Mountain National Park on that Aug. 7, 1965 outing. Vol. 1, No. 2 included an Oct. 2 trip in which Bob led 12 other birders through several birding spots in and around Golden.



Bob Spencer in 2018
Peter Burke

Continued on page 6

By December 1971, the newsletter was renamed *The Lark Bunting*, and it listed Bob as one of the club's field trip chairs, a job he held for more than 10 years. (The other chair was **Ruth Wheeler**, then the last living charter member of the Colorado Bird Club.) Among the hundreds of field trips Spencer led was his annual overnight excursion to North Park and Walden over the Fourth of July holiday, a popular fixture for years on the DFO calendar. He also served as club president (1989-91), vice president (1987-89) and on the DFO Board.

In 1995, Spencer became the ninth recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor and an accolade he helped create (Wheeler was one of the first two recipients). Two years ago, DFO granted him a rare lifetime membership. In 2008, he also received the Colorado Field Ornithologists' lifetime achievement award at the CFO convention in Cañon City.

Atop all of that, Bob Spencer also printed *The Lark Bunting* from its early days into the 1990s. He was a printer by trade when, just married to **Shirley Jackson**, they moved to Golden from New York state in 1952. Spencer was the in-house printer for the Colorado School of Mines for 20 years before running his own print shop, Fairmont Printing, until retirement in 1995. His son said that when Bob moved into assisted living three years ago, the hoard of collectibles and odds and ends in his basement included "boxes and boxes" of old editions of *The Lark Bunting*.

In annual Spencer family Christmas letters, Shirley dubbed her husband "Bird watching Bob," and she called 1992 "the year of the dove" for his finding of an Inca Dove, his 400th Colorado life bird, "a feather in his cap and a record for sighting this bird in Colorado." Married to Bob more than 50 years, Shirley died in 2006.

Bob Spencer was born on March 31, 1924, to **Clarence and Myrtle (Brown) Spencer** in Lockport, NY, about 40 miles north of Buffalo, where he grew up the oldest of six children. Their father, a trolley-car conductor, died of cancer when Bob was just 12. Bob and his siblings spent years in an orphanage because their mother couldn't earn enough to rent a place for them all. After high school, he worked 60-70 hours a week for a decade as main support for his mother and siblings.

Sometime during his young adult years in Buffalo, Spencer joined a hiking club. "It was not exactly a bird club, though

certainly birdwatching was part of it," his son said. "They were into nature. That's what got him really started with the outdoors." After Bob and Shirley married, "I think he saw Colorado was a great place to get out and do those things."

Colorado birders who knew him recalled Bob Spencer's kind, smiling manner, birding knowledge, and informal mentoring of young birders. Many especially remember his humor and wordplay, from clever twists of phrase to puns that drew as many groans as laughs.

"Bob was quite a character," said longtime Boulder birder **Joyce Takamine**, who first met Spencer on his Independence Day overnighiter. "He was known for his spoonerisms" – cleverly intentional slips-of-phrase that transpose the first letters or sounds of words for comic effect. Like saying, for instance, that someone had to endure a "*blushing crow*" instead of a "crushing blow."

"The collective laughter and groans Bob was responsible for would drown out the cranes in Grand Island, NE," Fort Collins bird and insect expert **Dave Leatherman** wrote on the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Cobirds email listserv. Leatherman recalled the day he quietly scoped Hamilton Reservoir north of Fort Collins with Spencer and several other birders, in pursuit of a constantly diving Yellow-billed Loon. "No noise except for the shuffling of feet and cold breathing," he wrote. "Then up rises a squeaky sing-song ditty: '*Out in the boonies, lookin' for some loonies*.' Guess who?"

Spencer's son grew up with the wordplay: "He had no qualms about acting a little bit goofy . . . And he was making puns up until the day he died." Perhaps none was cleverer than one he coined in his late 70s when his son set up an email account for him. When asked what email name Bob wanted to use, "he sort of instantly came up with BOBOLINK," son Bob recalled, still impressed. "All double-entendres were intended" – his name, a cool bird, and a "link" to the internet.

Besides birding, Spencer was an avid photographer, shooting thousands of 35 mm slides. Later in life, he became an amateur archaeo-astronomer, serving as an officer in the Denver Amateur Astronomy Club and as a member of the Loveland Archaeology Society. And he was a passionate collector of things other than birds.

Continued on page 7



Spencer kept thousands of stamped coin tokens used on buses, trolleys and subways, begun with a collection inherited at age 12 from his trolley-driving dad. He also acquired thousands of post cards and amassed tens of thousands of metal “good-for” tokens that 19th and early 20th century merchants gave customers to keep them coming back before paper coupons came along.

“He was one of those prototypical packrats,” his son said. “Very good at acquiring but not good at organizing. He would never let me throw anything out. Up to the day he died, at some level he thought that he was going to organize all of that,” including numerous notepads with bird lists from a lifetime of field outings.

Spencer also collected dozens of car license plates from every state, but only for the year 1935. His son thinks it was nostalgia for a happy childhood summer that year, when 11-year-old Bob and two younger brothers sought to spot plates on cars from (at the time) all 48 states. One year later, their father’s untimely death upended their lives.

Bob and his wife were founding and lifetime members of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Arvada. Bob Spencer is survived by sons Bob (wife Sondra) and **Jim (Connie)**, five grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. He was preceded in death by Shirley and their daughter **Carol**, and his brothers **Edward**, **Clarence** and **Donald** and sisters **Nancy** and **Lilian**.

The family has said donations in Bob’s name may be made to any of three organizations he supported: Denver Field Ornithologists (dfobirds.org), Colorado Field Ornithologists (cobirds.org) and Mountain Vista Senior Living Community (mountainvista.net).

Colorado birders remember Bob Spencer

The sad news of Bob Spencer's passing May 11 brought an outpouring of tributes and memories. Here's some of what Colorado birders had to say about Bob on the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Cobirds email listserv.

Ted Floyd, Lafayette:

"The last time I went birding with Bob was March 30, 2014," the day before Spencer's 90th birthday. "It was a totally serendipitous thing; we just bumped into each other . . . at the Cottonwood Marsh boardwalk in Boulder County. I asked Bob what was new, and he wryly remarked that that day was the last day of his ninth decade on this earth, and that he'd better go birding in case he'd missed anything his first 89 years and 364 days in this life."

Duane Nelson, Las Animas:

"I can give Bob no greater tribute than saying he was like a second father to me . . . (and) the first birder I ever met." Having birded alone in Colorado and in Chicago during college, Nelson returned home wanting to find and share "some good birds with whoever might have been interested." After joining DFO, Nelson discovered Bob Spencer in 1979 via DFO's old "telephone tree" to report rare bird sightings. One day, "Bob called me about a Palm Warbler in his yard east of Golden, and a friendship was born. We did countless local and more distant trips together. We carpooled together to DFO meetings, picking up **Ruth Wheeler** and **Freda Krolik** on our way . . . Great times and great memories."

Mark Obmascik, Denver:

"A few years back, Robert brought his dad in a wheelchair to see the Tropical Kingbird at South Platte Reservoir. On the roll back from the bird stakeout site to the car, it was hard to say who wore the bigger grin – the son or the father, who, if I remember correctly, had just seen Colorado bird No. 453. That day, only joy was contagious."

Tina Brown, Littleton:

"Bob always made sure you saw the birds on his trips. What really amazed me were all of his different interests. I asked him how he kept them all up. He said he could not (keep them up), but you have to have more interests besides just birding."

Doug Ward, Denver:

"I believe Bob was there on my very first birding trip led by **Hugh Kingery** down at Waterton way back in April 1973 when I was 8. Wow, time flies . . . He was a kind, funny, and caring man who you would always look forward to running into at a DFO meeting, or whenever and wherever folks were chasing down a rarity."

Bob Andrews, Yekepa, Liberia, West Africa:

"Bob Spencer was one of the first three birders I ever met (the other two were **Lois Webster** and **Patty Echelmeyer**). (It) was a DFO spring count in the Barr Lake area on May 13, 1967 (53 years ago) . . . Bob's infectious enthusiasm and laughter were one of the things that made that day so memorable, and on many subsequent days birding."

Steve Larson, Northglenn:

"I remember meeting Bob when I was about 21 out at Bonny (Reservoir) in about 1973 or '74. We were the only two people in the Foster Grove Campground and we sat around the fire and he was pointing out constellations to me. Something I have never forgotten."

Peter Burke, Niwot:

"I've had the pleasure of running into Bob Sr. and Bob Jr. on several occasions over the years. Even from his wheelchair, Bob's enthusiasm was contagious . . . The last time I saw them together was in fall 2018 out at Cottonwood Marsh in Boulder. After Bob filled me in on the birds that were around, [I took this photo of him.](#)"

Bob L. Spencer, Erie:

"Thank you all so much for sharing your fond memories of my dad! I wonder if there is some cosmic significance in the fact that he chose to pass on from this world during the peak of spring migration."

DFO's first ZOOM program June 23: Reducing Bird/Window Collisions

Susan Blansett

Do you know that preventable collisions of birds into windows are the second leading cause of bird mortality?

Or, that every year, between 350 million and 1 BILLION migratory birds perish in the U.S. because of lights and light pollution that lead to bird-window strikes?

Join us from the comfort home this month to learn about how smart people in cities all over the country, including Denver, are working to reduce needless bird deaths in urban building clusters where concentrated night lighting is a fatal attraction to migrating birds. You'll also learn how you can help turn this tragic loss of birdlife around.

Mark your calendar now for "Reducing Bird/Window Collisions" on **Tuesday, June 23 at 7 p.m. MDT** (more details coming shortly). This FREE webinar will be DFO's first online event using ZOOM, the popular videoconferencing app that has made live group communication easy for millions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our presenter will be **Alex Halverson** of Denver Parks & Recreation's "Lights Out Denver" project. Presented by the DFO Conservation Committee, Alex will discuss Denver's program, why it's needed, how it got started, and how interested volunteers can help in the autumn cycle of study and collision prevention, which is set to begin in August.

The project aims to improve birds' lot chiefly by curbing unnecessary nighttime lighting inside downtown Denver high-rises during spring and fall migration. For reasons not entirely understood, such lights distract or attract nighttime migrant birds, including most songbirds, into dangerous collisions with windows. Advocates for the birds seek to persuade building owners to DIM LIGHTS and treat windows to minimize collisions.

Again, this webinar is FREE for DFO members – but registration will be required. Watch your email inbox, the DFO website, DFO Facebook page or DFO Instagram feed for exact details soon about how and when to register.



In the meantime, if you haven't already done so, go to the ZOOM website at zoom.us and download the free version of the ZOOM app for your computer or smartphone. It's easy and fun.

Thanks in advance for joining us!

PHOTO ABOVE: Assembled birds killed by window strikes into Washington, DC buildings surveyed by Lights Out DC during 2013 migration. The dead include Worm-eating and Black-and-white warblers, Scarlet Tanager, American Woodcock, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Cooper's Hawk, Swamp and Song sparrows, Ruby-throated Hummingbird and more. (USGS Bee Inventory & Monitoring Lab photo)



DFO'S 85TH BIRTHDAY:
SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

My most thrilling bird experience: Thank you, Mr. Lewis

Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 in 2020. To mark this milestone, *The Lark Bunting* is publishing monthly "Snippets from DFO's Past" – personal remembrances, member stories, photos, bits of club history and trivia, and the like.

Robert Righter

About 15 or 20 years ago, I visited the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, MA to verify two Colorado specimens of Dusky-capped Flycatcher, an exceedingly rare species north of the Mexico border. Originally collected in the 1880s, the birds had somehow wound up in the Harvard collections.

The specimens had been authenticated previously by a well-known ornithologist not from Colorado, so the record had been accepted to Colorado's state bird list based on someone else's say-so. Since I was co-author of *Colorado Birds* with **Bob Andrews**, I had an interest in the Dusky-capped Flycatcher record. And since my brother **Jim** lived in Boston and I was going to visit him, I thought I could take a look at the specimens while there, as it was an easy hop over to Cambridge. No one had asked me to do this, but I had always thought the original verification was inadequate. My goal was to come up with first-hand, measured proof, which I did. I brought along my measuring equipment, took photos of the specimens, and later wrote an article for the *Journal of the Colorado Field Ornithologist*, describing what I had seen and measured.

Before leaving for Boston, however, I had another specimen in mind. I was aware that, housed somewhere within the museum's vast collection, was what is believed to be the original type specimen for one of the West's most striking birds, the Lewis's Woodpecker.

Yes, original as in, the first-of-its-kind known to ornithological science. The species was first seen by explorer **Meriwether**

Lewis himself on July 20, 1805, somewhere north of present-day Helena, MT, as his famous expedition with **William Clark** passed through. In his journal, Lewis wrote this:

We saw a black woodpecker or crow today about the size of the lark woodpecker as black as a crow. I indeavored to get a shoot at it but could not. It is a distinct species of woodpecker; it has a long tail and flies a good deel like the jay bird.

About a year later, the expedition did "collect" a specimen of the bird. Five years after the explorers returned home, the species was named for Lewis by America's first ornithologist, **Alexander Wilson**. Nearly two centuries later, Lewis and Clark scholars at the University of Nebraska wrote this footnote to Lewis's original 1805 journal entry: "Perhaps the only remaining zoological specimen of the expedition is the skin of a Lewis's woodpecker, now in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University."

I have always been interested in the discovery of new bird species, and the possibility of glimpsing a rare and famous American specimen of one excited me. So, after I was through verifying the flycatchers I had come to examine, I asked the collection manager if I could see the Lewis's Woodpecker specimen. Since I was the only one in the museum, she looked around and said, "Let's do it."

As we walked over to her desk, the excitement began to rise within my fragile nervous system. Opening a drawer, she took

Continued on page 11

SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

cont from page 10

out a metal box and unlocked it with her keys. Inside was another key. She removed it, and from there, I followed her around to a cabinet in the rear of the department. With that special key, she unlocked the cabinet, opened the door and slid out a tray.

After asking me to hold out both hands, she draped a cotton cloth over them and pulled a pair of cotton gloves onto her own hands. Reaching into the cabinet tray, she removed the Lewis's Woodpecker and placed it in my cloth-covered hands.

I cannot begin to describe how exciting this was. Everything was on the verge of shaking as it dawned on me what I was now holding. Meriwether Lewis had probably collected this specimen, William Clark had looked at and possibly handled it, and their guide

Sacagawea may even have helped dress

it. When the expedition returned to Washington, many luminaries of the past, most obviously **Thomas Jefferson** himself, would have proudly handled this first known Lewis's Woodpecker – a dark bird with an unusually colored belly and breast that Clark himself had described as “a curious mixture of white and blood red” so vivid it looked “artificially painted or stained.”

As I stood there, mind and heart racing as I held a historic birdskin two centuries old in my hands, the collection manager turned to me and smiled. She understood the connection with history I was feeling. It was the most thrilling bird experience of my life.

*Retired field ornithologist and author **Bob Righter** is a former long-time DFO treasurer, board member and field trip leader, and the 1994 recipient of DFO's Ptarmigan Award.*

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*Celebrate DFO's past, present and future!. Please share YOUR “Snippets” stories, photos or memories from ANY era, from 1935 to now. Memorable first field trip? Best birding lesson you've learned as a member? Favorite DFO birding destination? Email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!*



Lewis's Woodpecker
Jim Esten

Welcome to new DFO members

Scott and Sara
Hendrickson
of Denver, and
Robert Baylis of
Englewood

R.I.P., Colorado Rare Bird Alert, inspired by DFO

Patrick O'Driscoll

In the beginning, a “telephone tree” of dedicated DFO members spread word-of-mouth news of rare-bird sightings around Colorado in the 1960s and '70s. Then came the telephone voice-message “hotline,” with volunteers recording updates from the field that birders far and wide could dial in to hear.

Finally, in the early 2000s, the Colorado Rare Bird Alert brought these updates into the digital age, with daily postings to CoBirds and an email listserv of hundreds of birders in and out of state.

For more than 13 years, Boulder-based birder **Joyce Takamine** tirelessly compiled and posted the list of rarities from across the state by date, place and county. After she retired from Colorado RBA duty at the end of 2018, DFO resumed active management of the service with a patchwork team of volunteers led by longtime DFO member **Joe Roller**.

Unfortunately, this revolving duty – each compiler taking a seven-day shift, sometimes working late at night to post after midnight – became harder to staff in recent months. Some could volunteer no more than quarterly participation. A few committed to several months or a year before moving on to other priorities.

Despite periodic calls for more helpers, the effort could no longer sustain itself. “Our team of volunteers is no longer large enough to continue this information service, which has been sponsored for years by the Denver Field Ornithologists,” Roller wrote on May 26 in a “Rest in Peace” post to CoBirds. “In the past we invited volunteers to join the RBA team of compilers, but we are no longer seeking those, as the RBA is over now.”

The Rare Bird Alert was born of early notification work by a legion of dedicated birders, including **Norm Erthal, David Martin, Duane Nelson, Dick Schottler, Lynn Willcockson** and **Doug Faulkner**, among many others. At first, it was the DFO-sponsored telephone “tree” notification list. “Each birder in the tree,” said Roller, “would get a call from an excited birder up the list: ‘Hey! **Bruce Webb** found a Little Gull at Union Reservoir today. First state record! Call the next two birders on the list to let them know!’” Thus, word of each find gradually disseminated through the ranks of interested birders.

DFO’s longtime historian, the late **Warren Finch**, wrote of the RBA: “The statewide Colorado Rare Bird Alert sponsored by DFO, and since 2002 cosponsored by Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, was established in 1983 to replace the existing telephone tree.” Finch described the DFO system as “one of the best, if not the best, in the country because it (was) updated regularly, often daily, especially during migration seasons and for particularly rare species as soon as possible.”

Longtime birder **Larry Modesitt** of Arvada said it was the envy of the birding world in those days. “‘Daily’ might not seem special now, given the hourly alerts by eBird we now enjoy,” he wrote in a post to CoBirds after Roller’s announcement. “(But) when my business took me to different places,” including birding hotspots like McAllen, TX and south Florida, “I would call the local RBA and hear the rarities as of a WEEK ago.” Other birders out there told Modesitt he was lucky to be a birder in Colorado, “and three times I heard, ‘You have the best RBA in the country.’”

Continued on page 13

Takamine said the phone-in system was still in use after the RBA migrated to email via CoBirds. A Denver native who worked mid-career in New Mexico, she got involved after returning to Colorado in the early 2000s: “I think I went to some DFO meeting, probably in 2004, and they mentioned that they needed people to do the RBA because **Doug Faulkner** and whoever else was helping him” needed relief.

After Takamine contacted Faulkner to volunteer, “he gave me sort of instructions and said, ‘OK, we’ll give you a trial period’ – and he never took it back,” she said, laughing.

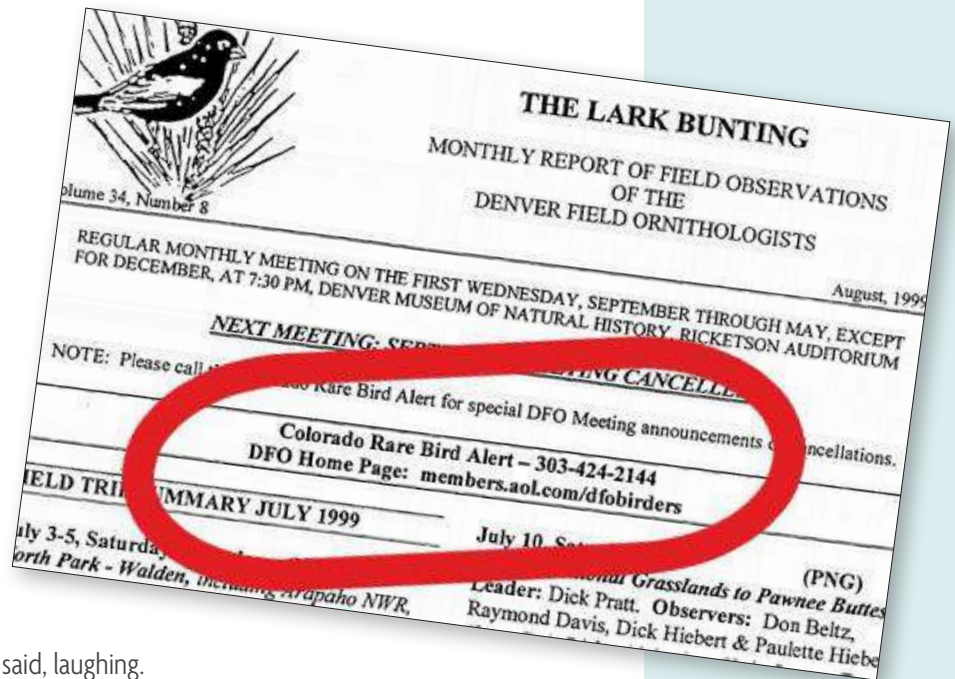
The recorded-message system continued until the equipment began breaking down and eventually quit altogether. “I can’t remember what year it died, but I did both (phone and email) reports until then,” she said. “It was funny. I have that clock that chimes on the hour with a bird song? So when I was recording the phone message, I would have to time it to finish either before the top of the hour or start recording after the top of the hour so the clock birds wouldn’t chime in.”

Meanwhile, the growth and popularity of eBird’s reporting of rarities by state, county and hotspot created a rising tide of data to sift through daily for the RBA. CoBirds and Facebook postings and other sources added to the flood. “Before it got so overwhelming, I’d get up an hour or so before I was going to post in the morning, check the Western Slope birding, and all those other things and then compile it,” Takamine said. “That was sort of doable until maybe 4 or 5 years ago. There were just so many (reports) to filter through. It got to be too much work.”

The death of the RBA has been mourned far and wide. In another CoBirds post after Roller’s announcement, Colorado birding authority **Bob Andrews** wrote on May 29 from Yekepa, Liberia: “Since I spend most of the year thousands of miles away from Colorado in West Africa, I don’t get any direct use of the RBA for birding. But I did enjoy seeing a compilation of the most interesting or unusual bird sightings from Colorado as a way to keep up with what is happening in Colorado. Many thanks to Joyce and then Joe and his team of volunteers and all of the other compilers who have provided this service.”

In the year and a half since Takamine passed the RBA baton to Roller, others who volunteered for the team included **Allison Hilf, Gregg Goodrich, John Drummond, David Leatherman, Patrick O’Driscoll, Dean Shoup, Burke Angstman, Cheryl Teuton, Lynne Forrester, Ira Sanders, Bill Kaempfer, Laura Steadman, and Donna Stumpp.**

In his May 26 announcement, Roller signed off with: “On behalf of the current team of RBA compilers, thank you for allowing us to share the joy of discovery through the decades . . . and good birding!”



Conservation inspiration? Look to like- minded birders elsewhere

Susan Blansett

Knowing how much DFO members care about making Colorado and metro Denver a better place for birds and other wildlife, the DFO Conservation Committee has been researching possible activities to fulfill that part of our club's mission. That means looking for things that you, our members, can support – projects about which we all can feel pride and a sense of accomplishment.

Curiosity led me to wonder how other birding clubs like DFO approach this aspect of conservation. I focused primarily on clubs not affiliated with Audubon, where conservation activities are already baked in. A quick scan of the American Birding Association list allowed me to choose several clubs from around the U.S. with metropolitan centers like Denver in their service areas. I picked these five:

- Central Valley Birding Club (CA) (www.cvbirds.org)
- Chicago Ornithological Society (www.chicagobirder.org)
- Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (PA) (www.dvoc.org)
- Georgia Ornithological Society (www.gos.org)
- Iowa Ornithological Union (www.iowabirds.org)

I also added the Denver and Evergreen Audubon chapters into my scan. As DFO shares significant crossover membership with both, our club's own efforts ought to be complementary to theirs and add value for our members.

What I quickly found was an abundance of worthy conservation activities in these other clubs, ranging from “easy, low-effort and low- or no-cost” to “ambitious, high-effort and high-cost.” A key factor in determining the level of

effort is the supply of active member-volunteers interested in carrying out such projects.

For instance, easy, low-effort, low-cost activities include loads of useful information that clubs can simply publish online for members and the general public to use on their own, whenever they want. In DFO's case, think gardening guidance for birds and pollinators, building and placing nest boxes, reducing housecat predation on birds, and preventing bird window-strike injury and death both at home and around commercial buildings. A couple of examples:

- Georgia Ornithological Society publishes its own guide to bird-friendly trees, shrubs and plants, including a resource list of nurseries. It also is one of more than a dozen birding groups nationwide that have adopted a four-point “feral cat policy” endorsed by the American Bird Conservancy in its Happy Cats, Healthy Birds campaign
- Chicago Ornithological Society publicizes bird-strike prevention tips and data. It also has adopted the same ABC-endorsed feral-cat policy as the Georgia society

In the vein of moderate-effort, medium-cost are grant-making funds somewhat like DFO's own Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund, but with a stronger, more specific conservation focus and active fundraising. For DFO, perhaps that could include adopting a local Important Bird Area (IBA) or favorite habitat and taking responsibility to pick up trash regularly or maintain trails and signs annually. Or perhaps building, placing, replacing and maintaining nest boxes for a specific habitat or species. Or even partnering with other bird clubs on larger-scale projects on important issues, species and habitat. Another example:

- The Iowa Ornithologists' Union partners with public and private conservation groups statewide to sustain Bird Friendly Iowa, under which cities and counties can earn “Bird Friendly” certification. In fact, the program has helped and recognized the City and County of Denver and other municipalities outside of Iowa for achieving and maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Continued on page 15

For clubs with enough ambition, imagination and resources, opportunities abound for tackling high-effort, high-cost conservation agendas, from broader advocacy at state, regional and even national levels to paying for, conducting and publishing research in habitats and species, hosting scientific conferences, promoting birding tourism, funding conservation fellowships and scholarships, and protecting a specific habitat or species.

One of DFO's oldest and richest counterparts is the Georgia Ornithological Society, co-founded by **Roger Tory Peterson** in 1926 (just seven years before DFO was born). In a congenial conversation with GOS president **Larry Carlile**, I learned that over time, legacy donations have built the society's endowment to \$2.5 million. "We're fortunate to be able to grant about \$100,000 annually to worthy conservation projects," Carlile told me.

By contrast, the Central Valley Birding Club's Waldo Hunt Fund in California is smaller but has paid for such meaningful work as publication of birding trail maps and research on the Tricolored Blackbird, declared endangered by international experts and a candidate for U.S. protected status.

The good news for DFO? Having high-level impact in pursuit of conservation does not require massive amounts of money. In partnership with like-minded organizations and individuals and by strategic pooling and deploying of people, time and money, we can do amazing things.

Here's another example: The Bird Conservation Network (www.bcnbirds.org) includes 21 birding organizations representing about 35,000 members in greater Chicagoland, southeast Wisconsin and northern Indiana. Funded with annual dues (just \$100 per organization) and donations via the network's website, BCN pursues and wins grants for bird monitoring, advocacy, conferences, "green paper" research and publication, bird tourism, species protection and conservation education for elected officials. Key to its credibility and success in local conservation is a vigorous cadre of volunteers.

All the clubs and examples I have cited here are sources of real inspiration. In reaching out to them, I was strongly reminded about the sense of community and shared purpose we enjoy with birders everywhere. DFO can be one cog in a



Birding clubs similar to DFO have projects that promote bird-friendly and pollinator-attracting native plants like milkweed, and efforts to curb housecat predation on birds and other wildlife (Meg Reck)

vast network of nature enthusiasts who make a difference every day for the birds we love. As we work to increase our conservation profile and pull our own weight for birds and habitat, we will recognize the extraordinary reservoir of knowledge, talent and passion already present within our membership, ready to be tapped for good use.

An indomitable and ambitious amateur birder named **Rosalie Edge** founded the world's first raptor sanctuary (Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania) in 1934. She famously said: "The time to protect a species is while it is still common."

I think we can all agree on that.

.....

Birding with 20./20 Vision is a series of monthly articles this year dedicated to exploring what conservation means to DFO – as a club, as birders and as citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. They aim to inform and inspire us to do more to protect birds and their habitats.

*Have an idea for this series? Send it to **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com.*



Wilson's Warbler
David Prentice



PICTURE THIS: YOUR PHOTOS IN THE LARK BUNTING

We've asked you before, and we're here to ask again: Send us your excellent Colorado bird photos for *The Lark Bunting*!

For the high-profile cover of our monthly newsletter, we seek great photos – in color, nicely lit, sharply focused – of the birds we see in our state in the course of the year. Whatever the bird(s) or the situation, we'd love to see your shots. They could be the cover photo, or perhaps inside with an article that features your subject bird . . . or maybe just as a stand-alone photo.

Here are the particulars:

Photographers must be members of Denver Field Ornithologists (if you are not but want to submit, go to the DFO website's [membership page](#) first to join the club!)

Photographers are asked to submit original, unedited photo files – not yet sized or cropped. If you're not sure, contact **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, at jcesten@gmail.com and he can explain

Send your photos and your questions to photo editor Jim at the same address. Thanks!

DFO NEWS

Mid-summer update on DFO field trips

After continuing to schedule field trips – but then cancel them on the first of each month as the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown has continued – DFO will not try to schedule trips again until the end of summer.

Field Trip Director **Karen von Saltza** announced that, after consultation with the DFO Board, trips will not be scheduled for posting until Sept. 1. She said this is out of continued caution and lack of information about whether trips can go forward safely by then. Von Saltza also said it was “hard to get our field trip leaders interested in planning a trip when the likelihood was that it would be canceled.”

In an email letter May 31 to all DFO field trip leaders, von Saltza wrote: “I know this is discouraging for leaders and participants alike. But we remain concerned for the health and safety of our membership and do not want to encourage any group behavior that may be risky at best.”

Of chief concern, she said, is the potential for a bounce-back of infections during the gradual reopening of public life in Colorado now just beginning. “Because there is a strong possibility that a second wave of the virus may occur in late summer, Denver Field Ornithologists does not want to resume our field trip program only to shut it down again,” she explained.

At the same time, von Saltza was encouraged by anecdotal responses back from DFO members who continue to go birding on their own “in a careful and responsible manner.” She noted that a number of members bird in “groups of two or three, wearing masks and respecting Centers for Disease Control guidelines for social distancing, and not sharing binoculars, scopes and other equipment or riding together in cars.” These also are components of the protocols von Saltza and the DFO Field Trip Committee have set for the resumption of public field trips, whenever that takes place.

“This is necessary birding behavior until the virus has abated,” she added, “and we have no idea at this time how long before that will be.”

Von Saltza asked trip leaders, and all DFO members, to “please continue to enjoy your summer in safety. DFO will return with a modified schedule of field trips as soon as we can, but not before it is safe to do so. The DFO Field Trip Committee will continue to closely monitor this situation and will advise you when circumstances change.”



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____

(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Field trips still on hold through autumn, but keep on birding, DFO'ers!

MONTHLY PROGRAM

eBird – Better Birding, Better Science

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME

John Paul II Center, Denver

BIRDING WITH 20/20 VISION

Knowledge of trees more than just “for the birds”

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Broad-tailed Hummingbird

 Gregg Goodrich
 Gateway Mesa Open Space, Castle Rock





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Field trips still on hold through autumn, but keep on birding, DFO'ers!

Dave Hill

Birdie, birdie, everyone!

The global pandemic continues to have us all pretty freaked out – or maybe it's just fed up. Either way, we still wear our masks, keep a safe distance, avoid crowds, and let's face it, spend more time indoors and away from each other than we'd like. The public health and medical experts say these are the best ways to slow the resurging spread of Covid-19.

That is why, unfortunately, the Denver Field Ornithologists Board of Directors has voted once again (in a Zoom online meeting July 26) to postpone the return of our most popular club activity – free, open and public field trips. The continued suspension of DFO outings will run through the fall, until the end of November.

It breaks our hearts not to be out there together in force for autumn migration, not to mention DFO's annual Fall Bird Count. We can only ask for your continued understanding as we look for stronger signs that we can gather safely in more than twos and threes.

But don't let this stop you from engaging in something we all love. Let's all continue to go birding – safely and responsibly, by yourself or with a trusted friend or two, always with masks and social distance. After nearly five months, we know the drill. We know how to do this without putting ourselves or others at risk. And, even though it is still summer, you have seen the signs. You know what's coming. Shorebirds are trickling back. Swainson's Hawks will be kettling up soon. Waterfowl are en route to fresh plumage. Fledglings are everywhere, growing and getting ready to go.

NON-NEWS FLASH: Just being outside in nature is healthful, physically and mentally. And if you've gained that "Covid 15" during quarantine, what better way than birding to help shed it? No time to brood – boost your mood. You know how. The birds are waiting.

Although we can't gather in person for monthly programs and workshops, DFO is embracing the Zoom webinar platform to bring them back virtually, online. Last month we held our first Zoom webinar. (See the "Lights Out Denver" article in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*). And this month, we'll restart our monthly programs via Zoom, too, with DFO veterans **Chuck Hundertmark** and **Gregg Goodrich** presenting a program about eBird. After that, look for a Zoom program in September on bird migration with naturalist, birder and guidebook author extraordinaire **Kenn Kaufman**. Check out the separate story elsewhere in this issue for details on these and the rest of the fall program lineup through November.

Yes, friends, we're beginning to roll again. With your help, let's get DFO on a roll!

Cheers and chirps,

Dave



Gregg Goodrich



Chuck Hundertmark

eBird – Better Birding, Better Science

Monday, August 24, 7pm
Gregg Goodrich & Chuck Hundertmark

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Denver Field Ornithologists is moving online to digital delivery of our next series of monthly programs. We will use Zoom webinar technology to gather as usual on the fourth Monday of the month. Join us – it's easy!

To begin our fall series, veteran DFO members **Gregg Goodrich** and **Chuck Hundertmark** will share tips, tricks and insights on using eBird to record bird sightings, contribute to research on bird populations and plan your next birding field experience.

Goodrich is familiar to many DFO members who have participated in his workshops and outings on using the eBird mobile app in the field. Gregg is an experienced birder and field trip leader who has used eBird for several years. Hundertmark is the past president of DFO, an avid field trip leader and experienced birder who will share his ideas about how and why to go further with eBird. (See Chuck's article elsewhere in this issue of *The Lark Bunting* for a taste of his eBird experience.)

This program promises to introduce those new to eBird to an invaluable tool for use in the field or from home, and to give those who already use it some fresh ideas about what it can do for your field ornithology.

Like all DFO monthly programs, this Zoom meeting is free and open to the public. Details about how to log in and join the Zoomcast on Aug. 24 will be sent out soon via email and announced on DFO's social media platforms.

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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Chico Basin Ranch's uncertain future

Susan Blansett

The call for help came to DFO in July, from Aiken Audubon Society in Colorado Springs. The Colorado State Land Board may consider subdividing Chico Basin Ranch into multiple leases or even selling part of the 86,000-acre holding. Were we interested in getting involved in the discussion?

This working cattle ranch, leased and sustainably operated with conservation of bird habitat and environmental education also in mind, has been a beloved destination of many a DFO field trip over the years. It is a rare treasure of prairie habitat and a vital stopover for avian migrants, with a documented count of 345 bird species.

At issue is the land board's need to optimize the revenue it generates from the property at a very critical time. Lately, revenues have plummeted from oil and gas leases on other public lands like Chico Basin. The land board's official duty is to manage state-owned public lands to generate financial support for Colorado's public education system. In the past 15 years, land leases and sales have generated \$2 billion for our state's schools.

Chico Basin is leased for active ranching, with a mandated overlay of public access and educational uses. The ranch's current lease expires in 2024, and the land board anticipates deciding no later than 2022 how to proceed when that lease is up.

Aiken Audubon is building a coalition of birding clubs, individuals and other concerned organizations to urge the land board to keep and maintain the ranch as is for public access, education, and preservation of its unusually intact and native shortgrass prairie ecosystem.

The land board and its staff already have been studying land values and options for Chico Basin for some months. The topic is again on the agenda for the board's next meeting, set for Wednesday, Aug. 12. Aiken Audubon has shared with DFO's Conservation Committee a draft of its letter to the board and has invited our club either to submit its own letter or to join others in signing on to Aiken's letter.

At a recent online meeting, the DFO Board of Directors, acting on behalf of all DFO members, authorized our committee to draft a DFO letter in support of Aiken Audubon.

We expect a decision as big and complex as the fate of Chico Basin Ranch will take some time yet. DFO is grateful to Aiken Audubon for bringing it to our attention in a timely way. Look for further updates on this issue in future issues of *The Lark Bunting*.

UPCOMING PROGRAM



Monday, Sept 21, 7pm
Kenn Kaufman

Patterns of Bird Migration in North America

Join DFO via Zoom for a very special program featuring **Kenn Kaufman**, author of numerous birding and wildlife field guides, as well as *Kingbird Highway* and *A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration*.

Kaufman will illuminate the varied patterns of migration for birds in North America. His presentation will be heavily illustrated with photos and maps and will examine species from a wide variety of bird families.

Save the date! More details to come in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* and via email for this great program and more Zoom monthly programs in October and November.

NOTE: Because of the Yom Kippur holiday, this meeting takes place on the third Monday instead of the usual fourth Monday



BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

John Paul II Center, Denver

Jim Esten

I think I have one of the best views in Denver, because these photos are what I see out my bedroom window.



Originally the St. Thomas Seminary, this patch of relatively open space in the middle of urban Denver is now the [John Paul II Center for the New Evangelization](#). It contains two seminaries, a library, a convent of nuns, the home of the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Denver – and a quiet place where birds brighten my view from home.

The gorgeous original buildings date from 1908 and are largely of a Mediterranean Revival style.

Closer to my house on this property is a bird-friendly detention pond, where I see a variety of wildlife, both with and without wings. Often there are Mallards and Canada Geese, but occasionally something else more interesting visits.



Fortunately for me, this pond – the centerpiece of my bedroom-window home patch – is mandated by the city and new construction cannot occur here.

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Have you adopted a local birding spot that has become your own “home patch”? Please share! Each month, The Lark Bunting plans to feature DFO member stories about the places they come back to again and again.

*If you would like to write about YOURS, email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!*



Top to bottom:
Great Blue Heron, Red Fox,
Solitary Sandpiper, John Paul II Center
Photos by Jim Esten

Birders' field notes: A useful new blade in eBird's all-in- one tool

Chuck Hundertmark

While preparing last May for a trip to Costa Rica, I came upon an [eBird post](#) that changed my perspective about the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's universal tool for birders and bird science in general.



Until then, I had regarded eBird and my use of it as something like a trusty old two-bladed pocketknife: a familiar tool that helped me and Cornell's vast ornithological community every time I pulled it out.

Like many birders, I first began using the online service as a nifty way to track my own bird lists. As a listing tool alone, Cornell's checklist application quickly proved to be amazing. It organized my life lists by county, state and country, and it provided numerous other useful functions for me, the birder. I thought of it as the first blade of the pocketknife.

The other benefit is that eBird turns every birding trip – by me and by its millions of users worldwide – into a contribution to citizen science. The species we see, and where and when we count them, are a rich trove of field data. Crowdsourced by legions of birders, all those numbers are analyzed by ornithologists for the betterment of bird science and conservation of the winged creatures we love. That was the other blade.

Over time, I also began using eBird for pre-trip research into birding destinations far and wide, seeing what other birders were finding where I planned to go. But it wasn't until I came across **Ryan Andrews'** eBird list for [Arenal Observatory Lodge](#) in the tropical rain forest of northwest Costa Rica that I realized this was no two-dimensional tool. I was holding an eBird Swiss Army knife, and this was a very useful third blade: citizenship in the global birding community.

Ryan's name probably won't ring a bell. For the record, he is a young birder from California, working toward a degree in evolutionary biology. I happened upon his [May 5, 2019 eBird checklist](#) for Arenal because **Paul Slingsby** and I were planning to make that our first stop on a two-week birding trip through Costa Rica. And what struck me about Ryan's 99-species list? In a word: *Detail*.

As you know, at the beginning of every eBird list, before you actually start tabulating species, there is a text box labeled "Checklist comments." In nine out of every 10 eBird checklists I look at when researching a location, that box is empty. No details, no narrative, no insight. Ryan's list, in contrast, offered 274 words, opening enthusiastically with "An excellent day!" He then laid out invaluable details of where he birded on the lodge's extensive grounds and trails and what he found at particularly birdy

Continued on page 7

spots. Ryan's words were very useful information, like this excerpt: "Waterfall trail was by far the best. There (were) small groups of birds constantly and we had good looks at Dull-mantled Antbird despite the lack of any ants."

I was so impressed, I emailed Ryan with my thanks. It was his reply that made me think about eBird membership as citizenship in the birding community:

"Glad you found the comments helpful! While preparing for my trip, I was disappointed by the complete and utter lack of information on most eBird lists. People often don't say what trails they walked and rarely give any information on target birds. It's very annoying! Fortunately, I was able to find a lot of info from other resources (namely Pat O'Donnell's blog) and found enough eBird checklists with comments/info to get by. I'm trying to provide as much info as possible in my eBird checklists while I'm here so people know what I did and where I saw the better species."

I have long used the comments section of my eBird lists to record basic weather conditions. Was it clear, partly cloudy, overcast? What was the wind like? What was the temperature? After getting schooled by Ryan, however, I'm working on adding more details about how I birded a location and where the activity was.

It's a work in progress, but I'm more conscientious now about how the rest of the birding community might use my lists. How about you? A few well-chosen words about the highlights of your outing can complete that list as an eBird equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife. You won't leave home without it.

DFO NEWS

Zoom-Zoom! "Lights Out Denver" is DFO's 1st online program

Susan Blansett

The first of what will likely be many DFO online webinars and events went smoothly June 23 when the DFO Conservation Committee hosted "Lights Out Denver: Roots and Future" via the [Zoom online meeting platform](#).

Alex Halverson of Denver Parks and Rec reviewed for participants the city's efforts to reduce bird/window collisions (the second highest cause of bird mortality in North America). Lights Out Denver is part of the city's commitment as one of [30 Urban Bird Treaty Cities](#). Denver's program staff and volunteers collect data on bird/window strikes at designated office buildings, and work to encourage more bird-friendly building design and practices.

A survey of event attendees after the program found 92 percent rated the presentation "very good" or "excellent," and they said they would recommend watching the presentation to others. Two attendees submitted their names to volunteer in future Lights Out Denver efforts.

You can watch the Zoom video archive of this program at [this link](#). To get there manually, go to the DFO website, [dfobird.org](#), select "Programs & Events," and click on the gray "Video Archives" button. Then click on the red video icon to the right of Alex Halverson's name at the top of the archive list. You're in!

If you are interested in volunteering for Lights Out Denver, DFO encourages you to contact Alex and the program directly via email at alex.halverson@denvergov.org.

Welcome to new DFO members:

Robert Baylis of Englewood, Janet P. Sacks of Cherry Hills Village, Katherin and Steven Meier of Denver, Catherine Ryan and Catherine Ryan of Denver, Karen Rosica of Denver, and Kris Bates of Centennial

Thanks for contributing to Friends of DFO and the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund:

Jim Petri and Christie Owens, Janet P. Sacks, and Sondra Bland and Bob Spencer in memory of Robert "Bob" Spencer

Knowledge of trees more than just “for the birds”



Max Miller

I was attracted to birding for a number of reasons. It's an activity outside. You get to look at beautiful, interesting creatures. You “solve puzzles” by applying practiced identification skills. By birding, you not only add to your knowledge of the world – you also feel your connection to and place

within it. Maybe I'm predisposed to enjoy this kind of pursuit, but over the past year I've also been captured by a similar and related interest that can benefit many fellow birders: identification and knowledge of trees.

As anyone who has seen a bird knows, trees are integral to the lives of birds. For this reason alone, they ought to interest every one of us. Indeed, there are examples of curious birders going the extra mile to “bird by tree.” Perhaps most famous is New York City naturalist **Ken Chaya**, who in 2011 co-created a map of all the trees of Central Park. Chaya's detailed knowledge of the arboreal environment in the park allows him to know, by their tree preference, roughly what birds to expect and where to expect them.

Last August I attended the DFO “Birds and Trees” seminar taught by retired Colorado State Forest Service entomologist **Dave Leatherman**. As someone curious to know more of “the story,” I had reached the point as a birder where I wanted to understand more about the what and the why of avian behavior. I left Dave's seminar with a better grasp of both, and an inspiration to “get on with it” in identifying trees.

That weekend I went out and picked up the *National Wildlife Federation Field Guide to Trees of North America* (Kershner, **Mathews**, **Nelson** and **Spellenberg**). I also recommend the Peterson Guide to Western Trees (**George** and **Olivia Petrides**) as a more compact guide you can carry into the field. Said guides in hand, I sought to reinforce what I already knew pretty well about some tree species (Ponderosa Pine, Plains Cottonwood) while learning about those for which I knew only the names (Boxelder, American and Siberian Elm). I took several trips in my home patch and paid a couple of special visits to the Chester M. Alter Arboretum on the University of Denver campus. This field practice was naturally limited by the approach of winter, as tree identification is immeasurably easier (especially for a beginner like me) if you can see the leaves, not to mention spring flowers or summer fruits.

Just knowing the name of a tree species – as when you know how to identify anything else familiar in your environment – is immensely satisfying. (“Look at the bird in that Austrian Pine!”) But tree ID is only part of the picture when you're looking for explanations about the birds themselves. Trees offer them shelter, food and (sometimes) water.

Many birders are already intimately aware of the shelter component. Ask those who participate in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch citizen science initiative. Everyone knows many birds nest in trees (or roost in them when not nesting). I would hazard that many birders are even aware of basic local tree preferences, if only by instinct. In my own patch, for example, I was already quite familiar with the stands of cottonwoods that Great Horned Owls favor for nesting sites, the streamside willows that harbor migrating warblers in spring, as well as the elms that a variety of passerines seem to use in all seasons.

But to me, the food part of the equation yields the richest observations. Knowing birds' food habits and preferences is basic, especially for us non-specialists. General statements like “eats seeds” or “feeds on insects” are broadly helpful but hardly specific. Although my own observation of these behaviors is still in its infancy, the observations of others often surprise and inform me. Look no further than Leatherman's own “The Hungry Bird” writings in Colorado Field Ornithologists' quarterly journal *Colorado Birds* and elsewhere. He includes rich evidence that birds dine on tree-based food sources in ways we may not expect from the general descriptions in our field guides.

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What might a developed knowledge of a bird's primary tree-related food preferences tell us? For starters, where and when we may find it. For example, Colorado birders may note the American Three-toed Woodpecker's affinity for bark beetle larvae, which can be found in our state's subalpine Engelmann Spruce and Lodgepole Pine forests, especially those that experienced wildfire in the previous two years. Similarly, many of you are likely aware of the Pygmy Nuthatch's predilection for insects and seeds in the pine forests of our Front Range foothills.

But beyond the obvious benefits for your birding, a knowledge of trees and how birds use them is also a strong foundation for a broader grasp of habitat. When it comes to our advocacy as bird-loving conservationists for these areas and their denizens, understanding of habitat is crucial. Many of us wish to see natural environments preserved, but wishes alone don't inform great conservation activism. Couple the knowledge of what's in a patch of forest and why the organisms in it live there, and you've got the data and the vocabulary that support and guide effective advocacy.

As you get started in tree identification, you will learn that you know much more than you think. Begin with some of the basic classes and differences – deciduous vs. coniferous, the many varieties of conifers, and so on down the line – and build from there. Sometimes species-level tree ID informs your birding, and other times a larger category, genera or family-level ID is more helpful. Most of all, enjoy your enhanced knowledge as you explore the many habitats that the Denver area and the rest of Colorado have to offer.

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*This is one in a series of monthly articles dedicated to exploring what conservation means to DFO – as a club, as birders and as citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. Birding with 20/20 Vision aims to inform and inspire us to do more to protect birds and their habitats. Have an idea for this series? Send it to **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com.*

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Top to bottom:
Great Horned Owl in Cottonwood,
Western Tanager in Ponderosa,
Cottonwood
Photos by Max Miller





Tom Wilberding

DFO'S 85TH BIRTHDAY: SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

The games we play: joining Colorado's "64/20 Club"

Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 in 2020. To mark this milestone, *The Lark Bunting* is publishing monthly "Snippets from DFO's Past" – personal remembrances, member stories, photos, bits of club history and trivia, and the like.

Tom Wilberding

My story dates back to my days before joining Denver Field Ornithologists. I am willing to bet, however, that it may have a certain universal appeal to fellow birders. That holds true whether you are a member of Boulder Audubon (as I was after **Barb** and I first moved to Colorado from Michigan in 2004), or Colorado Field Ornithologists (where I was treasurer for a couple of years and still post photos occasionally to CFO's Facebook page), or DFO (which I joined 3 years ago after **Joe Roller** asked me to help set up DFO's books, and after we moved to Littleton).

When we first arrived in Boulder, I attempted to do some local birding. But after noticing that there seemed to be fewer birds here than in Michigan, I got interested instead in trying to identify wildflowers on mountain hikes. But eventually, I went on some birding field trips offered by the local Boulder Audubon. I soon met some friendly birders who showed me around, particularly **Bill Kaempfer** and **Todd Deininger**. I became very impressed with the number of expert birders in Colorado and its many active birding clubs and resources.

Bill and Todd not only enjoyed birding and were good at finding birds, they also liked the listing game. It was (and still is) a friendly competition among Colorado birders to see who could tally the most bird species – per yard, per county, per state, per ABA North America, per year, per just about *anything*. Although *eBird* had been invented a couple of years prior, it had not yet taken hold of the birding world's imagination. So, to make your lists public in Colorado, you would fill out a form with the species and numbers from your outing and email it to CFO, which would compile and post the lists online. CFO still affords this opportunity today, in several categories, on its CFO's Listers webpage (<https://cobirds.org/Listing/>).

One listing game that intrigued me was "Colorado county listing." At the time, someone told me that to start a public list in any of Colorado's 64 counties, you had to establish yourself by finding at least 20 bird species for that county. Once you had listed at least 20 species in every county in the state, you then became a member of the prestigious but informal "64/20 Club." And oh, BTW, if you could spot an individual species in all 64 counties – for instance, a Northern Flicker, Barn Swallow or Black-billed Magpie – it was noted with some admiration, even reverence.

As a newcomer to Colorado, I decided that attempting to join the 64/20 Club would motivate me to see this entire new and beautiful state. Barb was not interested in that level of intrastate wandering, but she gave me the go-ahead, so off I went. It took me a few years, often on solo road trips, but on May 26, 2009, I reached my goal: I saw an American Robin on Wolf Creek Pass in Mineral County – my 20th species in my 64th county: 64/20 at last! How to celebrate? I had a 7-inch-tall trophy made for myself (my only trophy, BTW). Barb attached a little bird to it. I swelled with pride like a sage grouse strutting on his lek. I had become an expert Colorado birder!

Well . . . not so fast. Not long after my lists were posted at CFO, some real experts began to laugh. "You know, Wilberding," they would begin, "you are dead last on almost all county lists. Most county listers try for 25, 30, or 50 species per county. When you get to 20 in a county, do you blindfold yourself and drive on to the next one?"

Ouch! But then: Hmm, how shall I save face? "Well, you don't understand," I would reply. "I do this like golf. The least effort and lowest score wins."

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SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

cont from page 10

Anyway, as time went on, I began to switch from listing birds to photographing them. But whatever the game, Colorado's birding community is a big tent. We are all fortunate to be able to enjoy so many aspects of birding and nature study in such a beautiful home state. How lucky we are to be here!

*Celebrate DFO's past, present and future!. Please share YOUR "Snippets" stories, photos or memories from ANY era, from 1935 to now. Memorable first field trip? Best birding lesson you've learned as a member? Favorite DFO birding destination? Email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!*

DFO COMMITTEES

DFO needs YOU . . . for committee service

Denver Field Ornithologists is expanding its committees to provide more opportunities for member involvement – and with it, fresh perspectives from new volunteers.

Come help shape our club management and policies and make new friends among other birder volunteers. Participate in the inner workings that make our club go. The work is voluntary, so you will determine how much time you can and want to commit. DFO committee work can be enormously satisfying.

Right now, DFO is seeking new members for:

DFO Grants Committee

Each year, the DFO Grants Committee solicits applications, reviews requests, and recommends awarding of grants to researchers and educators from DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund. The committee sends out and publishes notices each fall seeking funding requests in bird-related conservation projects primarily in Colorado. After receiving the requests, committee members review them and meet in February to recommend to the DFO Board of Directors which researchers, educators and projects to fund. A committee chair coordinates the process.

If serving on this committee interests you, contact DFO Nominating Committee chair **Bea Weaver** at beamiami@aol.com or DFO President **Dave Hill** at d_d_hill@comcast.net.

DFO AdBIRDtisements!

DFO members may now submit free advertisements and announcements to *The Lark Bunting* to sell or seek to purchase birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, etc.). This includes materials offered for donation.

- Advertisements may include descriptions of merchandise for sale or being sought, including condition and asking price
- Ads must include full name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a website link if merchandise or items are being offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit ads for inappropriate content or excessive length (50-word limit; no accompanying photos or artwork, please)
- Ads will not carry over month-to-month. To renew, you must resubmit
- This service is free – but it is available *only* to DFO members
- **Advertising deadline is the last day of each month** (except June; *The Lark Bunting* does not publish a new issue in the month of July)

To place a DFO "AdBIRDtisement" or if you have questions, contact **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, by email at patodrisk@gmail.com. Please include the words "DFO ADVERTISEMENT" in email subject field.

Next advertising deadline: Monday, Aug. 31

This month's AdBIRDtisements:

WANTED

Used scope and tripod.
Contact Dave Hill at 303-796-0638

Shopping on Amazon? Your purchases can now support DFO via “Smile” donations

Patrick O'Driscoll

Denver Field Ornithologists has registered our club with Amazon.com's charitable giving program, [Amazon Smile](https://smile.amazon.com). When shoppers on the world's biggest online marketplace check out and complete their purchases on Amazon's smile.amazon.com page, Amazon donates one-half a percent (0.5%) of the price of their purchases to the registered charities of their choosing.

Best of all, there is no additional cost to you. After you sign up once in Amazon Smile and designate “**Denver Field Ornithologists Inc**” as your preferred charity, Amazon will donate that percentage of the price of your purchases to DFO. The only requirement is that when you're ready to check out, you complete your transaction on the Amazon Smile page.

This means that you can start shopping at amazon.com, Amazon Prime, the Amazon Smile page or any other way you normally interact with Amazon, adding items to your shopping cart as you go. The key is that sometime BEFORE you click on “**Proceed to Checkout**,” you need to be on the Amazon Smile page.

Doing so is easy: Just type “Amazon Smile” into the product search box at the top of any Amazon page and hit the “return” key. That brings the Amazon Smile logo onto your page. Now click on that logo and you'll be in Amazon Smile. You will still see your pending order, shopping cart and other Amazon features like before – except from here, any order you place will generate a contribution by Amazon. Check out as you would for any Amazon purchase, and Amazon will donate one-half percent of the price of your purchases to DFO.



Before you shop, you'll need to sign up once in Amazon Smile to designate your charity (DFO, we hope?). Start that one-time process at <https://smile.amazon.com>. Fill in the sign-up information, and when asked to pick your charity, type “**Denver Field Ornithologists Inc**” in the charity-name field and click “**Select**.”

From then on, when ordering from Amazon on the Amazon Smile page, you will see “Supporting Denver Field Ornithologists” near the top of the page, just below the product search box. If you're checking out and you don't see that “supporting” message, check again to make sure you're in Amazon Smile or that you have designated DFO.

In the future, every time you order, as long as you are in <https://smile.amazon.com> before checking out, your purchase confirmation message will display this note:

“You made a difference. Amazon will make a donation to Denver Field Ornithologists.”

Yes, one-half of 1 percent is literally half a penny on the dollar. But over time and with more participants, those “ha’pennies” can add up.

But don't forget: If you don't make your purchase via the Amazon Smile page, there will be no donation. You cannot restore a missing donation if you forget to make your purchase that way.

Birding in a Colorado SWA? You need a license now



Patrick O'Driscoll

As we reported in the June issue of *The Lark Bunting*, you now need a valid state hunting or fishing license if you go birding in any of Colorado's 350 State Wildlife Areas (SWAs) and 240 State Trust Lands (STL) sites. The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission adopted this new requirement unanimously in April, and it went into effect on July 1.

Originally meant for seasonal hunting and fishing only, these preserves have become increasingly popular for non-“sporting” pursuits – birding, photography, hiking and the like. However, these areas were never intended for those uses. In its written reply to non-hunters and anglers who have asked about the new requirement, Colorado Parks & Wildlife says most SWAs are critical for wildlife to rest, feed, breed and give birth in non-hunting and fishing seasons: “In that way, year-round outdoor recreation may have negative impacts on the wildlife populations in those areas.”

CPW also says the license requirement for all is “an effort to limit multi-use recreation on these properties, not encourage it. While hikers, photographers, birders, and others may in fact be recreating by watching wildlife, only those with a hunting or fishing license (have been) contributing to the purchase and maintenance of these properties.” By CPW's own definition, “wildlife-related recreation” in these areas is hunting and fishing – not birding, photography or other wildlife-watching activities.

A list of CPW's frequently asked questions about the new regulation, shortened slightly for length and relevance to birders, follows below. [Or, click on this link for the complete CPW narrative and all the FAQs.](#)

Again, if you have a valid Colorado hunting or fishing license, you are welcome to enter SWAs and STLs. If you have neither, the cost of an annual fishing or small-game hunting license is well under the cost of an annual state parks pass.

A 2020 Colorado resident fishing license costs **\$35.17 for ages 18-64**, and **\$9.85 for age 65 and older**. An annual resident small-game license costs \$30.11. Any and all can be purchased in person or [online](#). When buying an annual license, those between ages 18 and 64 also must purchase a \$10.13 [Habitat Stamp](#) that helps fund efforts to preserve and improve fish and wildlife habitat. They

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But stay tuned: The discussion still goes on

Susan Blansett

After Colorado Parks & Wildlife established the new requirement that all visitors to State Wildlife Areas have a valid hunting or fishing license, user groups across the state have pushed back on two fronts:

- The desire for a separate “non-consumptive” license for those who go to SWAs not for hunting or fishing, but for birding, hiking, kayaking, photography, camping, etc. Such a new license would provide CPW data on uncounted user groups eager to be permitted for our interests and recognized for our contribution
- The desire for a more open CPW decision-making process to allow for public involvement every step of the way

The DFO Conservation Committee monitored the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Commission's July 16-17 meeting and offers this update.

Enforcement. Although the rule change is fully in effect as of July 1, CPW is being circumspect for now about enforcement in the field, choosing to make education of unaware (and perhaps unlicensed) SWA users its first priority and issuing tickets only to hard-core or repeat offenders of the licensing requirement.

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cannot buy the license without also paying for the stamp. To clarify: For age 65 and above, the Habitat Stamp is NOT required.

Frequently Asked Questions

(For complete FAQ list and CPW narrative, go to: <https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/LandWater/SWA/License-Requirements-SWA-STL-Access-FAQ.pdf>)

What is the regulation and cost of the fine for being on an SWA without a hunting or fishing license?

The statute they will reference is: "Did unlawfully enter a State Wildlife Area without a proper and valid hunting or fishing license" (**2 CCR 406-9-#900.C.1 pursuant to 33-6-104(1), C.R.S.**) or "Did unlawfully enter a State Trust Land leased by Colorado Parks and Wildlife without a proper and valid hunting or fishing license" (**2 CCR 406-9-#902-B.5 pursuant to 33-6-104(1), C.R.S.**). The penalty would be a \$100 fine plus \$39.50 surcharges for a total of \$139.50 and five (5) license suspension points. Our first priority with our officers and other staff will be seeking to educate first, especially over the course of the next year. However, if officers are continually contacting the same individuals who are not following the rules, they may choose to issue a citation. We're also looking into updating signage, especially in areas where the rules may be confusing.

What licenses will be acceptable to access SWAs & STLs?

All proper and valid hunting and/or fishing licenses will be acceptable for the license year from April 1 through March 31 of the following year. A 1-day and/or 5-day fishing license would ONLY be valid the day(s) specified on the license.

If I bring my whole family, does everyone need to purchase a hunting or fishing license?

Any person 18 years and older will need to purchase a proper and valid hunting or fishing license to access a SWA or STL property. Any person under 18 years of age and engaged in any activity that requires a proper and valid license still must be properly licensed. For example, a 16-year-old wanting to fish on a SWA will need a fishing license.

How do I identify if a public property will require a hunting or fishing license?

Any SWA or STL that is managed by CPW that is open to the public requires a hunting or fishing license. SWAs and STLs are all signed with property identification. A complete list of lands administered by CPW can be found in the [Colorado State Recreational Lands Brochure on the CPW website](#).

License alternatives. CPW staff is working with Commission Chair **Marvin McDaniel** and Vice-Chair **Carrie Hauser** to craft possible alternatives to hunting/fishing licenses for non-"sporting" users. CPW Director **Dan Prenzl** aims to bring findings back to the commission in September. Potential approaches under discussion include:

- A check-off option for "non-consumptive" users to self-identify as such when buying hunting/fishing licenses for use at SWAs
- Research into how other states deal with the issue of conflicting or differing uses
- Negotiation with federal authorities on the critically important program under which Colorado receives a 25 percent funding match for every hunting and fishing license it sells. Getting the same match for a new class of licensed SWA users would be vital to the state's ability to manage the areas. Such essential matching funds account for a sizable part of CPW's annual budget
- Exploration of potential solutions that would go even further

Stay tuned! The Conservation Committee will continue to monitor and report back to you in *The Lark Bunting* and all other DFO communications platforms.

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Will the SWA Access Permit no longer be an option for non-hunters and anglers?

That is correct, a SWA Access Permit will no longer be an option for non-hunters and anglers for those four SWAs that currently have the requirement for an access permit. However, current 2020 SWA Access Permits will be honored until March 31, 2021. Persons who have already purchased a SWA Access Permit for this year will be allowed to use that permit for this year only.

Why didn't my SWA Access Permit contribute to CPW?

The SWA Access Permit was not recognized under the Federal Aid Program as a valid hunting or fishing license. The current SWA Access Permit system, used on only four SWAs, negatively impacted the CPW wildlife finances. The monies generated from this access permit fund lessens the following year's Federal Aid monies used by CPW by the amount the SWA Access Permit fund accumulated.

Why did the Commission not consider creating a wildlife watcher license that can be used to access wildlife properties?

Any wildlife watcher license would have issues similar to those created by the State Wildlife Area Permit (see above).

Does this action go against supporting access programs on public and private lands (Goal #4) - Future Generations Act (e.g. limiting access)?

No it does not. The funding allows CPW to keep these lands available for public access. The Future Generations Act (SB18-143) grants the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission authority to enact modest increases to state park entrance

fees and Colorado hunting and fishing licenses to address projected funding shortfalls of \$30 million annually for wildlife and \$11 million annually for parks by 2025. One of the 10 goals of CPW with this increased revenue is to expand public and private land access. A person can access a SWA open to the public by purchasing a proper and valid license just as a person has to purchase the proper parks pass to access a state park or outdoor recreation area. Examples of supporting access on public and private lands are: 1) purchase and opening the new state park at Fishers Peak; 2) the 210,000-acre increase of state trust lands leased by CPW that provides limited seasonal hunting and fishing opportunities; or 3) increasing the number of acres of private land leased under the Walk-In Access program for small game hunting opportunities.

Does this license requirement apply to national forest or BLM lands? Does this apply to state parks?

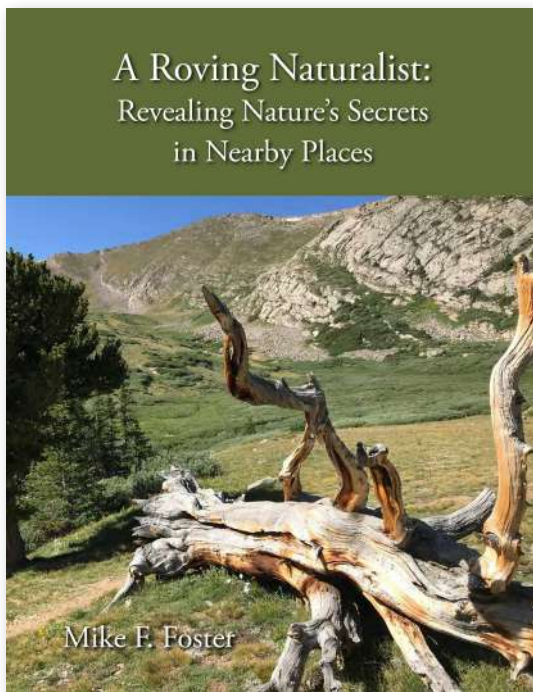
No, this only applies to SWAs opened to the public and to STLs that are leased by CPW. It does not apply to other public lands such as State Parks, National Forests, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), county properties, or municipal properties.

Do users of trail systems connecting to SWAs need to purchase a license?

Yes. The intended use of SWAs is wildlife habitat and wildlife-related recreation. While recreational use of trails on these properties is not a primary intended use, a license purchase for recreational trail use, where allowed, can be used to help maintain connected trails.



Cinnamon Teal
Jason B. Bidgood



Keen insights into nature at some of Denver's favorite birding spots



A Roving Naturalist: Revealing Nature's Secrets in Nearby Places

By Mike F. Foster

2020 (self-published), 296 pages (PDF format)

FREE download to computer, iPad or iPhone at

<https://birdingwithmike.com/download/a-roving-naturalist/>

Patrick O'Driscoll

This smorgasbord of an e-volume dishes up author **Mike Foster's** considerable knowledge, keen observation and informed opinion about the natural world. One by one, *A Roving Naturalist* focuses on 56 nearby destinations in greater Denver, most of them familiar to local birders, hikers and nature lovers. Each gets its own chapter, into which the author somehow blends elements of guidebook, memoir, natural history and commentary.

In the introduction, Foster admits his approach "may appear as a motley mishmash, but the mix is deliberate." His way does make it convenient to read chapters in any order, a variety of bites for the moment's appetite. Each chapter is bookmarked digitally for easy access by place name. So you can rove, without fumbling, to sample a close-in local park here, dip into a foothills destination there, or check out an edge-of-the-Plains spot or two beyond. There's also a list of driving directions to all the destinations, footnotes, a glossary of terms, and a 5-page list of sources and further reading.

The chapters open with top-of-the-page summaries of basic essentials: location, size, trail mileage, maps, and such. The summaries then set the table with three utensils Foster uses to serve the chapters' varying narratives:

- **"Topic"** lays down highlights of each park or place (geography, trails, history, plants and animals) in the manner of a guidebook, informed by Foster's personal take on key elements of the naturalness of that location

- **"Portrait"** dips deeper into notable features or aspects (a key wild species or element of topography or landscape). It ranges farther afield for broader but related stories and scientific truths about life and how it works (including what sustains it and human activities that imperil it)
- **"Context"** often reaches well beyond the bounds of place to elaborate on lessons Foster has learned that echo in that location but connect to universal elements – bird variety in pine forests, climate science, fire ecology, winter survival, dinosaurs, the food chain and "birder vs. birdwatcher," to name just a few

The range of subjects is remarkable, but not so esoteric or down in the weeds that the reader gets lost. Perhaps that reflects Foster's background as an instructor and author.

In the "Topic" passage about Denver City Park, for instance, he uses the park's remarkable bird diversity for so urban a setting (150 species seen annually) to riff about a worrisome trend getting a lot of attention now: the overabundance of ordinary birds (geese, gulls, magpies, crows, starlings and the like) at the expense of increasingly less-common ones (especially warblers and other songbirds). He goes on to opine about (and reinforce with facts) the natural and unnatural constraints on birds and other life in settings both urban and not.

Continued on page 17



Black-capped Chickadee
Jim Esten

BOOK REVIEW *cont from page 16*

The places *A Roving Naturalist* takes us tilt heavily to Jefferson County (or “JeffCo” as Foster casually writes in his first reference to the county). More than three-quarters of these destinations are in it. Then again, the county does have many of the nicest, wildest close-by locations for roving – from three Colorado state parks, four of Denver’s “Mountain Parks” and 25 Jefferson County Open Space parks to well-known favorites like Bear Creek, Belmar and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt and lesser-known gems like Two Ponds National Wildlife Refuge in Arvada.

JeffCo is also the author’s home patch. A Lakewood resident, Foster is a fourth-generation Coloradan who caught the birding bug by age 10 after watching a hummingbird family nest, incubate, hatch and fledge their chicks. A life lived in the natural world is evident in his complex blend of themes, voices and genres in each chapter.

Although *A Roving Naturalist* covers life forms from plants and insects to an array of wildlife, Foster, a DFO member, admits his bias toward birds. “In any location you may visit, birds will fly into view,” he writes. “Learning the lifestyles of birds will increase your pleasure and add to your understanding of life itself We can learn things from birds.”

I was surprised at the omission of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, the largest nature preserve in metro Denver (and half the distance from town that Barr Lake State Park is). Yes, its bird list (262 species) is smaller than those of Barr, Cherry Creek and Chatfield state parks (all well over 300). But the Arsenal’s unique history (wartime chemical weapons factory, Superfund cleanup site) and wildlife variety (a thriving bison herd, black-footed ferrets) could have added an enriching chapter.

Many of the places Foster did choose will be familiar as destinations for DFO field trips. But *A Roving Naturalist* might well lead regular visitors to see old favorites with fresh eyes. He asks readers to think of his book as “an introduction to nature, from an eager companion in the field.” For me, reading it felt like an adult “enrichment” course on nature taught by an avid fellow birder. That’s a gift at any price.

.....

*Read any good new books about birds lately? Written a new one yourself about birding or a bird-related topic? Tell us more and we’ll look to reviewing it in the pages of The Lark Bunting. Send book titles, more details and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Or call or text him at 303-885-6955.*



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 56 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2020

DFOBIRDERS.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Birds ZOOM . . . and so do we!

MONTHLY PROGRAM

Patterns of Bird Migration
in North America

PROFILE

Tuesday Birders' Ann Bonnell:
Rebel with a cause

CONSERVATION

Chico Basin: Colorado's
prairie gem for birds
is a model of ranching
stewardship

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Cattle Egret

📷 Jim Esten

📍 Washington Park,
Denver





Patterns of Bird Migration in North America

Monday, Sept 21, 7pm MDT via Zoom
Kenn Kaufman



Join DFO and renowned author and birder **Kenn Kaufman** for this fascinating look at bird migration. In North America north of the Mexican border, most bird species are migratory to some extent, but there is a huge amount of variation in the routes and timing of their travels. Some species may move only a few miles between their breeding and wintering ranges, while others travel from the Arctic to the edge of the Antarctic. Some travel thousands of miles and then arrive with pinpoint accuracy at the same territory every year. Others are nomadic, seldom returning to the same place twice.

Very few birds actually migrate straight north in spring and straight south in fall. Their routes of travel may take them in any direction, and some migration takes place on every day of the year. This program, heavily illustrated with photos and maps, will feature species from a wide variety of bird families, revealing some overall patterns in the remarkable twice-yearly journeys of these small travelers.

As a teenager in the 1970s, Kenn Kaufman hitchhiked all over North America in pursuit of birds, an adventure later chronicled in his cult-classic book *Kingbird Highway*. After several years as a tour leader, he transitioned to a career as a writer, editor and illustrator.

Most of Kenn's energy these days goes into book projects and painting bird portraits. He has written a dozen books, including seven titles in his own [Kaufman Field Guides](#) series. His other books include *Lives of North American Birds*, *Flights Against the Sunset*, and the latest, *A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration*, published in 2019. Kenn is a field editor for *Audubon*, a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society, and the only person to have received the American Birding Association's lifetime achievement award twice.

This program will take place using Zoom online meeting technology. Pre-registration is required. Guarantee your spot as a DFO member by **Sept. 15** by submitting your name and email address using this link: <https://forms.gle/dXSpLjvICPWi5P3j9>. After that date, registration will open to non-members. DFO is investigating a livestream service in the event that interest exceeds the capacity of our Zoom license. We will share more details on that via email and on the DFO website by Sep 16.

COMING UP . . .



Monday, Oct 26
7pm MDT (Zoom)
Chris Rurik

2-Wheelin' in the 5-Mile Radius

Chris Rurik, DFO's own Pacific Northwest "ex-pat," will open a window into the 5MR birding phenomenon and birding by bicycle. Chris will illustrate the beauty of "birding where you're at" with stories from his adventures as a pioneer in Denver County birding, as well as more recent sojourns near his apartments in Alaska and Washington state.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Birds ZOOM ... and so do we!

Dave Hill

Birdie, birdie, everyone!

Denver Field Ornithologists is now immersed in the online reality of Zoom. So far, I'm quite pleased with what this global teleconferencing app allows us to do in a challenging time of keeping distance and holding no in-person gatherings because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Zoom has been a wonderful way to engage our DFO committee and board members – and as of last month, to engage YOU! Consider this for a moment: Our easy migration to doing business and sharing elements of our pastime remotely is a 180-degree spin from the usual elbow-to-elbow DFO social gatherings of the recent past.

Although we love (and have missed for six months) “being DFO” in person, there have been unexpected advantages, at least temporarily. Travel time and fuel saved not driving to meetings, programs and workshops, for instance. Has it calmed your hurry like it has mine? It doesn't hurt our personal finances, either, and it contributes to the measurable improvement in metro Denver's air quality.

In fact, Zoom has allowed DFO to continue bringing birders together. After our very successful August 24 evening program, “[eBird: Better Birding, Better Science](#)” (*read the review in this issue of the newsletter*), I got a nice email from **Laurie Duke** of Elizabeth. “I am enjoying the ZOOM meetings from the comforts of home instead of driving in to Denver,” Laurie wrote. “When we do get back to ‘normal’ I hope the DFO presentations will be available both virtually and in-person.” From south Texas came an email from DFO past president **Tami Bulow** (2005-2007): “It was a great program, and having been an eBirder since the mid-nineties, I still learned more about the applications. Especially the mobile one, which has been a battery-eater for me here.”

With Zoom, our reach has no limit. Engage notable speakers from distant locations? See it happen on Sept. 21 at DFO's next monthly evening program, “Patterns of Bird Migration in North America” with **Kenn Kaufman**, birding authority and legendary creator of numerous wildlife guides. (*For details, see the article in this issue.*) Kenn will join us via Zoom from his home location in northwest Ohio. We're expanding our Zoom capacity to 500 attendees for this and future online presentations to accommodate the entire DFO membership and then some.

As I write this, a Black-capped Chickadee is gurgling in the linden tree in my front yard. Earlier, a flock of Bushtits “lined by.” I'm in a good birding “place,” despite the

Continued on page 4

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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disruption of the pandemic. Are you, too? I hope so. Here's a thought: If you're feeling trapped indoors and you're not watching the backyard feeders, consider opening one of two recently published books that involve our favorite wild creatures. The first is *Vesper Flights*, a collection of 40 essays by naturalist **Helen Macdonald** about how we make sense of the world around us. The second is *The Bird Way: A Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent, and Think* by **Jennifer Ackerman**, who shares a view of how birds conduct their lives. I think both offer respite from the world of coronavirus.

In the past few weeks, I have also noticed opportunities to improve my knowledge of birds and birding (like that great DFO eBird program the other night). Just last week, **Erik Bruhnke**, a Victor Emanuel Nature Tours guide, led a free online webinar, "Raptor Identification 101." And the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "Bird Academy" offers so many and varied course offerings. I recently enrolled in the "Be a Better Birder: Sparrow Identification" course and am enjoying its self-paced structure. If you're looking for something to get you through the isolation and improve yourself as a birder, view the complete course catalog here: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/course-list/>. I bet you'll find something of interest.

Lest I ramble further, so long for now: Chirps and Cheers!

— Dave

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Wash Park egrets and herons complete 2020 nesting season

Kathryn Smith and Colleen Nunn

Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night-Herons successfully hatched and fledged new generations again this year on the island in Washington Park's Grasmere Lake.

Three volunteer observers in DFO's Colonial Waterbirds citizen science project report that the egret colony brooded a minimum of 49 young, while the heron colony reared about 20 young. This would represent changes over 2019 – 25 percent more heron chicks than the 16 recorded last year, and about 11 percent fewer egret chicks than the 55 counted last year.

The 2020 season began when the first four adult night-herons arrived in late March. Within two weeks there were 25 birds and by May 3, the peak of spring migration, there were 165 adults on the island. Most of this high number moved on. The ones that remained were soon at work repairing old nests.

The egrets began arriving in late April and within three weeks, observers counted 97 adult birds. In mid-May, 51 adults were seen at 34 nests. Many of these did not stay to breed. However, each evening throughout the summer well over 100 egrets returned from elsewhere to roost overnight.

Even though the herons had a month's head start on the egrets, by the end of June, nestlings and fledglings of both species were visible. Counting birds in nests was difficult as they were hidden in the tree leaves. The island presented a cacophony of sound from food-begging and feeding behavior.

Overall, there were 20 breeding adult Black-crowned Night-Herons and 20 chicks from 10 nests. Of the Snowy Egrets, there were 28 breeding adults and 49 chicks from 14 nests. As of late August, about 30 juvenile egrets and 17 juvenile herons were still active on and around the island. Just two adult Black-crowns were still seen, as well as one adult Snowy being pursued by two juveniles begging for food. But observers noted that more than 100 additional Snowy Egrets (a mix of adults and juveniles) were returning to the island to roost overnight.

Given the high number of birds of both species on the island at peak migration, perhaps the limited space resulted in the lower number of final breeding adults. That said, 24 productive nests may be a decent count for a small urban island.

Continued on page 5



Snowy Egret Young
Steve Smith

CITIZEN SCIENCE *cont from page 4*

While observing the two species at the nest this season, the volunteers consulted the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's website, www.allaboutbirds.org, for better understanding of what they saw and heard. Of particular interest was that males and females of both species take turns incubating the eggs. "As one egret mate takes over for the other, it sometimes presents a stick, almost as if passing a baton," reads one passage about Snowys, while another passage about Black-crowned notes, "Night-herons greet each other with calls and raised feathers when switching over duties."

Washington Park is one of 49 waterbird colony sites throughout Colorado listed on the CitSci.org citizen science website and database at locations where volunteers collect and report nesting data. CitSci.org is a national database on the state of the nation's natural resources, collecting observations from citizen science volunteers who gather data on birds, mammals, trees, water and butterflies. Scientists analyze the data for trends in population, condition of the animals, movements of species, and nesting patterns. This information adds to scientific knowledge and is used to decide if conservation efforts are needed.

Five of those CitSci.org sites, including Washington Park, comprise the DFO project. The other locations include Denver City Park, Belmar Park in Lakewood, the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt and the Parker Water District pond in Parker. Species followed in the DFO program also include Double-crested Cormorants and Great Blue Herons. DFO's project started in 2017 and hopes to begin analyzing its own data after five years of observations have been gathered. (For more about the DFO Colonial Waterbirds Project, visit the citizen science page on the DFO website, at <http://dfobirds.org/Birds/CitizenScience.aspx>.)

DFO NEWS

Volunteer opportunity: Lights Out Denver

The fall cycle of Lights Out Denver, the city project to reduce bird/window collisions, is underway! This is a great way to help during the Covid-19 pandemic with essential research on bird window strikes because you can work at "social distance" and in the early hours of the day. If you're interested, contact project coordinator **Alex Halverson** immediately at alex.halverson@denvergov.org.

To learn more about Lights Out Denver, you can also view a recording of Alex's Zoom online presentation to DFO in June. It's on our website at www.dfobirds.org. On the homepage, scroll down to the "Stay Connected with DFO" section and click "Past Program Videos." When the list of programs appears, click on the red icon next to Alex's name. (To access the video directly, you can also go to <https://archive.org/embed/dfo-2020-06&autoplay=1>.)

DFO awards record amount in grants for 2020 bird research in CO

Patrick O'Driscoll

Denver Field Ornithologists has awarded \$7,350 in grants for 2020 to four avian research projects from the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund.

The awards will help Colorado scientists studying chickadee nestling diets, a western Colorado heron rookery, the movements of Flammulated Owls and a genetic explanation for Redpoll plumage variation. The combined \$7,350 in funding represents the largest total annual award since DFO established the fund in 1994.

DFO offers grants annually for projects in three areas of study: education in the knowledge of birds, research in ornithology, and conservation of birds and their habitat. The grants fund was established in 1994 as the Educational Endowment Fund with a \$15,000 donation from **Mary Hope Robinson**. The fund was renamed in 2012. (For more information about the program, including application form, visit the DFO website's grant fund pages at <http://dfobirds.org/Projects/Grants.aspx>.)

The grantees were approved by the DFO Board upon recommendation of the DFO Grants Committee, which reviewed this year's applicants. (**Elaine Wagner**, a member of the committee, is the committee's new chair.)

Here are this year's awardees, grant amounts, and descriptions of their research:

Cori Carver, University of Colorado Boulder, \$1,350

"Exploring the Effects of non-native Tree Species on Chickadee Nestling Diet"

Carver will explore how increasing urbanization with non-native tree species affects the diet of native songbirds on Colorado's Front Range, specifically Black-capped and Mountain chickadees in the Boulder area and mountains west of the city. Carver believes the rural-urban vegetation shift may change how and where chickadees gather insect prey in urbanized ecosystems. Ultimately, she aims to inform urban land planning by assessing potential ecological costs and benefits of different trees on native birds' success in rearing and fledgling young. Carver's co-investigators are **Kathryn Grabenstein** and faculty adviser **Scott Taylor**.

Erik Funk, University of Colorado Boulder, \$2,000

"A large chromosomal inversion explains plumage variation in a globally confusing bird system"

Funk will study chromosomal genetics in Redpoll finches that migrate to Colorado to escape harsher northern winters. He describes three currently recognized species of Redpoll (Lesser, Common, Hoary) as notoriously difficult to tell apart because of plumage polymorphism (variation in color), in this case from white to brown. He says persistent variation suggests Redpolls function as a single population, and that inversion – rearrangement of chromosomes in Redpoll genetic structure – could explain it. He aims to sequence "long-read" genetic data to determine if Redpoll differences are "balanced" polymorphism in a single population or early stages of evolution into different ones. Funk's co-investigators are **Scott Taylor** and **Nicholas Mason**.

Ellie Orr, Western Colorado University, \$2,000

"Ecology of the Slate River Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) rookery and impacts of human activities"

Orr is studying a unique breeding colony of herons in the Slate River wetlands near Crested Butte – a longtime rookery of

Continued on page 7



Great Blue Heron
Jim Esten

DFO GRANTS *cont from page 6*

20-plus nests in conifers at nearly 9,000 feet elevation. Site owner The Crested Butte Land Trust is trying to protect its ecological integrity while allowing human access; river floaters pass directly beneath the colony, far closer than the recommended 800- to 1,000-foot buffer in nesting season. A voluntary no-float period through July 15 was adopted in 2019, and the study seeks to assess effects of river recreation on heron life via a new “Floater Ethics Index.” Orr’s co-investigator is **Jake Bartholomew** and her primary research supervisor is **Patrick Magee**.

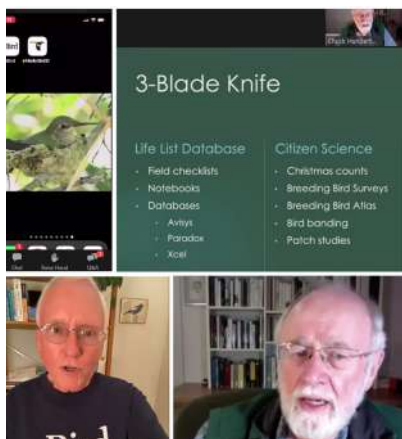
Scott Yanco, University of Colorado Denver, \$2,000

“Drivers of Flammulated Owl Movement Behaviors in Colorado”

Yanco’s ongoing, multiyear project has received DFO support in the past. He seeks to understand whether habitat preference among Flammulated Owls in the Hot Creek Research Natural Area (Rio Grande National Forest) southwest of Monte Vista is driven by prey abundance or other factors. The area contains older, larger-crowned Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine trees that the owls prefer generally for nesting, foraging and roosting, but prey abundance can vary. (Nocturnal moths appear to be most of the prey brought back to nests.) He is building a landscape model of prey availability for his research. Yanco’s co-investigators include **Drs. Mike Wunder, Brian Linkhart and Peter Marra**.

Grant recipients are required to report to the DFO membership about their projects in any of three ways:

- Presentation at a monthly DFO meeting
- A field trip to the project site
- An article (600 words or fewer) to be published in *The Lark Bunting*, and possibly on the DFO website, which could accommodate longer articles with tables



MONTHLY PROGRAM REVIEW

Monthly programs return via Zoom with Gregg + Chuck's jam-packed eBird revue!

Patrick O'Driscoll

Six months after DFO's last in-person event before the Covid-19 pandemic, Denver Field Ornithologists' series of monthly evening programs resumed on Monday, Aug. 24 with a Zoom-powered eBird tutorial chock full of interesting stuff.

The 90-minute "eBird: Better Birding, Better Science" was led in tandem by veteran DFO members **Gregg Goodrich** and **Chuck Hundertmark**. Gregg, a field trip and workshop leader and DFO's resident wiz with eBird Mobile, led participants on a step-by-step trek through the powerful, free smartphone app that allows birders to compile and file outing lists from the field. Chuck, also a field trip leader and two-time DFO past president, preached the gospel of eBird's vast database and innumerable online features that help individual birders personally and the greater birding community globally.

After a welcome by DFO President **Dave Hill** and introductions by Programs chair **Bill Turner**, Hundertmark led off with a brief discussion of eBird's largely untapped capacity for sharing your trip details to the direct benefit of birders who follow you. He called it a new tool in his own "three-blade eBird knife." This revelation came to him after running across another birder's detailed trip summary for the same eBird Hotspot Hundertmark planned to visit on a birding trip to Costa Rica last year. He was so impressed with that birder's helpful information that he wrote an essay about it in last month's newsletter (see *The Lark Bunting* September 2020 issue, "A useful new blade in eBird's all-in-one tool," in the [past issues archives of the DFO website](#)).

Hundertmark's recurring message: Use the "comments" and "details" areas in your eBird lists to leave helpful data for

others who will bird the same place after you – from general descriptions of the trip, site and weather conditions, bird abundance and the like to notable bird behavior, more precise locations for key sightings, and shoreline and water level conditions during migration.

Goodrich linked his smartphone to the Zoom platform and led the audience on a mock field trip. He started a virtual checklist, smoothly and easily listing birds while also checking maps, GPS coordinates, nearby hotspots, and an array of other remote functions. He even used the related Merlin bird program embedded in the app to confirm a bird ID. "It's definitely made me a better birder using eBird," he said.

After Goodrich's eBird Mobile presentation, Hundertmark explored the key facets of eBird's desktop presence. He touched on a dizzying array of tools and functions, from how to enter "historic" past birding lists compiled before eBird came along in 2002 to easily searching your way through eBird's thousands of birding hotspots. He singled out top-of-the-webpage clicks for closer attention, including:

- **Submit** — how to start, build and enhance your outing's list
- **Explore** — species maps, finding hotspots, targeting specific birds, setting up alerts, and many, many more options
- **My eBird** — organizing and tracking your own species and trip reports, life lists, and endless ways to examine and crunch your birding numbers
- **Science** — where and how the vast data in our millions of eBird reports worldwide ends up helping researchers and bird conservation

Continued on page 9

- **Help** — multiple FAQs, how-to's and other nuts-and-bolts essentials to a better eBird experience, from bird breeding codes to a nifty tutorial about techniques for estimating the size of large flocks of thousands of birds

Noting recent disappointment for some Colorado birders when the statewide Rare Bird Alert via Cobirds was discontinued, Hundertmark showed how you can set up your own daily rare bird alerts from eBird for Colorado or any county, state, region or country.

Before Q-and-A with the Zoom participants, Hundertmark flagged a final clickable button: “Donate.” Support eBird and its “growing and skilled group” of birders and ornithologists, he said, “and watch for ways to make it more engaging and fun for us to use.”

The presentation was jam-packed in one more way. Attendance hit the 100-participant limit for DFO’s Zoom meeting function, which is twice the average attendance at most of DFO’s previous in-person monthly meetings. In an email apology to members, President Hill pledged that the DFO Board is “exploring options to increase the attendance capacity of our Zoom webinars and are planning to make adjustments for future programs,” including our September program featuring noted birding and wildlife guidebook author Kenn Kaufman. (See complete details on page 2 in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*.)

Within an hour of the teleconference’s conclusion, a rave review was posted to the Cobirds email list-serv by an attendee most appreciative of the presentation.

“This was by far the most productive meeting I have attended bar none,” wrote **Tony Kay** of Denver. “While it is great getting everyone together to socialize and enjoy the presentations, tonight’s presentation was special. As a participant I was able to follow and replicate every instruction suggestion and tech advice Greg and Chuck had to offer . . . The amount (of) information the two of you managed to go through in 90 minutes was staggering. Thank you so much for the time and effort you put into this presentation. Good job.”

If you missed the live Zoom presentation, the recording is up and available at the Past Programs Archive page on the DFO website (<https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>).

FREE AdBIRDtisements!

DFO members may now submit free advertisements and announcements to *The Lark Bunting* to sell or seek to purchase birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, etc.). This includes materials offered for donation.

- Advertisements may include descriptions of merchandise for sale or being sought, including condition and asking price
- Ads must include full name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a website link if merchandise or items are being offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit ads for inappropriate content or excessive length (60-word limit; no accompanying photos or artwork, please)
- Ads will not carry over month-to-month. To renew, you must resubmit
- This service is free – but it is available *only* to DFO members
- **Advertising deadline is the last day of each month** (except June; *The Lark Bunting* does not publish a new issue in the month of July)

To place a DFO “AdBIRDtisement” or if you have questions, contact **Patrick O’Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, by email at patodrisk@gmail.com. Please include the words “DFO ADVERTISEMENT” in email subject field.

Next advertising deadline: Wednesday, Sept. 30

FREE TO GOOD HOME

FREE BIRD BOOKS!

Books donated to DFO on birds and birding, home and abroad, normally are available FREE at in-person monthly program meetings. Because those are on hold, we’ll take our inventory to the BARR LAKE BIRDING FESTIVAL on Sept. 12 at the park visitor center, 9 a.m. to noon. Drop by the DFO table and HELP YOURSELF!



CONSERVATION

Chico Basin update: Partway to protection?

Susan Blansett

Not long after last month's issue of *The Lark Bunting* was published, the Colorado State Land Board took up the question of Chico Basin Ranch's future for the third time in 2020. A coalition of birding and conservation groups including Denver Field Ornithologists has rallied this summer in anticipation of land board action on whether to sell the state-owned ranch, continue it as conservation-oriented cattle operation, or break the 87,000-acre property into smaller parcels for lease.

DFO's Conservation Committee, which monitored the land board's Aug. 12 meeting, reports that the board voted to "hold the entirety of Chico Basin Ranch through at least 2034" – in other words, to not sell the property anytime soon. While the vote is an encouraging move, what board members did not decide is whether the ranch will remain intact under future ranching leases, remain open to public access including birding, or what uses may be allowed in the near future.

On the agenda for the board's next meeting on Sept. 9 is a "workshop discussion" in which commissioners will seek consensus on goals they hope to achieve "through a new lease or leases on Chico Basin Ranch." The board's staff says it is not seeking any "formal action" at this time. The board previously has said it aims to decide no later than 2022 how to proceed when the present lease expires for the ranch, which is about 25 miles southeast of Colorado Springs in El Paso and Pueblo counties.

At the board's August meeting, commissioners expressed appreciation for the ranch's capable management under Box T Partners/Ranchlands, the **Duke Phillips** family-owned company whose lease ends in 2024. (*See related article about Ranchlands on the following page.*) Under the company's stewardship, Chico's shortgrass prairie ecosystem has been improved (a plus for the ranch's popularity as a premier destination for birding, including DFO field trips) while simultaneously supporting the company's cattle ranching operation.

The land board also acknowledged receiving more than 100 letters about the ranch and its fate, so our voice was heard. The concerned coalition led by Aiken Audubon of Colorado Springs had submitted a joint letter (signed by DFO President **Dave Hill** and numerous other groups and individuals) urging the land board to maintain Chico Basin within its portfolio as one, uninterrupted parcel with a single lessee, and to continue to assure public access to the property. DFO also submitted a separate letter of support, reinforcing the wisdom of keeping the ranch intact with public access.

At issue is the land board's need to optimize revenue at a very critical time. Revenues from oil and gas leases on other state-owned lands have plummeted this year. The board's official duty is to manage these lands to generate funds to support public education in Colorado. In the past 15 years, land leases and sales have brought in \$2 billion for our state's schools.

Once again, DFO, Aiken and other coalition partners will monitor the Sept. 9 meeting, which is scheduled to start at about 8:30 a.m. MDT. (You can also attend via Zoom teleconferencing app at this link on the State Land Board website: <https://slb.colorado.gov/public-meetings>.) Keep an eye on your email inbox and the "News" page of the DFO website for any updates. And if you want to receive updates directly from the land board, sign up at the same link. The update option is listed under the "Q&A" subheading.



CONSERVATION

Chico Basin: Colorado's prairie gem for birds is a model of ranching stewardship

Colleen Nunn

Recent deliberations by the Colorado State Land Board about the future of Chico Basin Ranch have spotlighted a place with special significance to Colorado birders. Many of us have fond memories of DFO field trips across its vast expanse of native shortgrass prairie and sandsage ecosystems. The mere mention of “Chico” brings a smile to those of us who have birded in an exceptional avian refuge that also operates every day as a working cattle ranch.

We know how satisfying and exemplary the birding has been there through the years. Carpooling two hours south to the ranch's remote-yet-accessible location in El Paso and Pueblo counties, we have buzzed with excitement about “lifer” birds we've seen or hope to see – and the ones we have not seen elsewhere in years. We know there's a good chance we'll see them at Chico, where a staggering 344 species have been recorded (maybe more than anywhere else in the state).

A critical reason *why* we love Chico Basin Ranch is that its livestock operation – under current ranch lessee Box T Partners of Colorado Springs (better known as [Ranchlands](#), with five ranches in four states) – has used conservation ranchland management practices to preserve the landscape for all the creatures within it.

Ranchlands' lease for this state-owned prairie jewel expires in 2024, and the land board recently decided not to sell the property for now. That was encouraging not just to birders but to all who value large-scale conservation of unique, diverse and vital landscapes in our state. We do not know, however, whether the board will seek to maximize income from Chico Basin Ranch by subdividing it into multiple leases instead of keeping as a single parcel. As the board works toward that decision, it is instructive for us to know more about how we birders – and the ranch and its inhabitants – benefit from Ranchlands' conservation actions.

In truth, most of us birders don't realize Chico Basin Ranch is as large as it is (136 square miles) because we don't see much day-to-day agriculture. We may have seen cattle on the range, but we mostly miss feeding and other signs of human caretaking: careful regulation of cattle numbers in pastures, rotational grazing to rest the land, and the fencing, watering, and all the other elements of a working livestock business.

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Top to bottom:
Turkey Vultures (Anna Elledge/Ranchlands)
Burrowing Owl on cholla cactus (Bill Maynard)
DFO birders seeking Sprague's Pipit (Mark Amershek)

CHICO BASIN *cont from page 11*

Nor have we witnessed all the proactive work by Ranchlands to improve the land for all its inhabitants. For instance, it works to eradicate invasive and alien vegetation (Russian olive, tamarisk, burdock, Russian knapweed) so native plants, trees and bird species (longspurs, buntings, plovers, sparrows, Burrowing Owls) can thrive. It also re-vegetates ground with native grasses and shrubs, and targets habitat improvements to plots for pheasant and quail, and it replants native cottonwood and willow as part of stream regeneration work.

There's also the ranch's work building nest boxes for waterfowl on the properties' ponds, and hosting a bird banding operation (20 years and counting) that has helped scientists track dispersal and migration, behavior and social structure, life-span and survival rates, reproductive success and population growth.

We also rarely see biological surveying by outside agencies and the school and college programs that Chico Basin Ranch hosts for studying amphibians, fish, spiders, dung beetles, moths, birds and other wildlife. Data gathering not only adds to scientific knowledge about the ranch's shortgrass prairie and sandsage ecosystems, it also helps Ranchlands learn whether and how to stabilize, increase or decrease wildlife populations.

I believe it is all this effort that *we don't see* that enables us to have what we all say are "great days of birding at Chico." The memories are so vivid, so embedded in our sense of the place. I think of two "lifers" I first saw there, Least Bittern and Prairie Warbler, neither of which I have seen anywhere else since. I see the striking color of that warbler, sitting stock-still just one foot above me, its distinctive eye markings and streaked flanks, the yellow body, the rufous-striped upper back. Whew! And the bittern, playing hide-and-seek for 30 minutes until my unforgettable glimpse. I also think of the Veery, which I saw there in 2015 (and have seen nowhere else since), lurking beneath willows. Every time I visit Chico now, I bend and strain at the waist in that habitat until I can see the Veery's reddish-brown warmth and complete my field trip. Those are some of my memories; I expect many of you have Chico stories of your own.

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CHICO BASIN *cont from page 12*

Our anecdotes are important, but so is scientific opinion and observation. I was struck when I read the Aug. 4 advocacy letter to the lands board by the coalition formed by Aiken Audubon Society of Colorado Springs, signed by biologists, professors, scientists and two dozen Colorado birding and nature organizations, including DFO. Their bottom line: Chico should remain intact.

“From a landscape-level conservation standpoint, the existence of 87,000 contiguous acres of high-quality shortgrass prairie, sandsage prairie, creeks and wetlands is exceedingly rare and a major asset within the degraded and diminishing prairie of eastern Colorado,” reads a key passage. The letter adds that more than half of the native shortgrass prairie and 20 percent of the sandsage in Colorado already have been lost to agriculture and other uses. If today’s Chico Basin Ranch is fragmented, birds and other prairie-dependent wildlife will also decline.

The coalition letter also notes the negative effects of fragmentation on bird nesting success, including greater damage by wild predators if it occurs “on a landscape scale” at large places like Chico. Native bird species that would remain after breakup would have less breeding success, and we could well observe fewer “special” bird species in our visits there.

Still another argument for keeping Chico Basin Ranch whole is the vulnerability of wildlife species already. The coalition letter points out that Colorado’s shortgrass and sandsage prairies support several dozen wildlife species now listed by Colorado Parks & Wildlife as “Species of Greatest Conservation Need.” The Aiken coalition letter mentions

three bird species in the top tier for conservation that nest on the ranch: Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl and Ferruginous Hawk. They also include two threatened species not known to breed at Chico but that still live there – Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Golden Eagle. The state also insists that 20 other “Tier 2” bird species found at Chico are critical to conserve as well.

Finally, the letter notes a special triple-dependent association of concerned species – the plovers, owls and prairie dogs – that Chico Basin Ranch’s large landscape supports. And as the ranch operator’s website (www.ranchlands.com) notes, Chico Basin Ranch is “one of the largest uninterrupted stretches of shortgrass prairie left in the United States.” In a separate advocacy letter from Audubon Colorado Council, which represents all the organization’s chapters in the state, Chico Basin Ranch’s large, unfragmented size and spring-fed ponds and lakes have significant “conservation value as a wildlife and migratory corridor.”

And so, because of all this, we birders have the chance to observe an array of birds not commonly seen in one place anywhere else in eastern Colorado – from warblers (Blackpoll, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue, Palm and Prairie, to name just five), to migrating Sandhill Cranes, ducks and shorebirds. To see them, we may have to be in the right place, looking in the right direction, at the right time – but there may not be a better “right place” for that in Colorado than during spring and fall at Chico Basin Ranch. The best chance we have to preserve that privilege is for the ranch’s operation under Ranchlands’ conservation management model to continue for many years to come.

Tuesday Birders' Ann Bonnell: Rebel with a cause every day of the week



Ann Bonnell on the trail
Rob Raker

Susan Blansett

I first approached **Ann Bonnell** in June about writing a profile piece on her. Having come to know her (as have so many others) through Tuesday Birders, the popular weekly birding meet-up she has led since the mid-1980s, I have long admired her vitality, birding skill and dogged conservation activism, which I witnessed during the 15-year fight to save the habitat and character of Chatfield State Park.

Conscious of Covid-19 risks, Ann still welcomed me in person for our interview – both of us masked and socially distanced on the patio of her Littleton ranch-style home. The first of

our two sit-downs was occasionally interrupted by the birds coming to Ann's feeders and birdbath. Her backyard setup is an expansive habitat with bird-friendly plantings and lawn rimmed by deciduous trees and conifers. The Bonnells and their neighbor long ago kept their yards open to create a shared playground for their children. Once the kids flew the nest, Ann erected feeders and the neighborhood, as they say, "went to the birds."

A pair of towhees, several goldfinches, chickadees, robins, House Finches, a wren and a couple of hummers occasionally entertained us as we talked. Until we first met 12 years ago, I knew very little about Ann, who this year marks 40 years as a member of Denver Field Ornithologists. So of course I began with all the usual questions about where and how she grew up. Within those first few minutes listening to her, I realized that the determined, nature-loving crusader we know today was forged at a tender age.

As a 7-year-old, **Ann Jane Krummes** rejected "the rules" for little girls growing up in Fairfax County, VA during and after World War II. "I always would rather be outdoors than indoors," Ann says. "I was out with the boys while all the other girls were inside learning how to cook and stuff like that. We'd ride our bikes down to a little creek about three miles away and swim with our clothes on. The Black kids came from over the hill, and we all played together just fine."

Nine years later, that would change. On a snowy winter day, 16-year-old Ann and her friends were sledding down their favorite hill, which had recently been annexed for development by the City of Alexandria. A police car pulled up, and two officers stepped out just long enough to chase away some of the teens – the Black ones. Indignant, Ann marched over and knocked on the police car window. "Why are you making the Negro kids leave and not us?" she asked.

"That was before the civil rights movement, of course," Ann recalls. "Well, he rolled up the window and ignored me, so I tapped on the window again, because even at that age I was kind of persistent. And I told him, 'I don't understand what you're doing!' And he looked me right in the eye and said, 'If you're such a (g-- d---- N-word)-lover, why don't you go over to Washington D.C.?' When Ann got home and reported the exchange, her mother (also named Ann Jane Krummes) phoned the police department to complain. Her calls were likewise ignored.

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Ann in the field
Rob Raker

It is striking for one so young to hold those in authority to account. But in Ann's case, it took a rebel to raise one. "Mom was from the '30s -- burned her bra, drank bathtub gin, smoked till the day she died," Ann says with a chuckle. "Everyone in my family smoked back then. I tried it, and thought, 'This is the biggest waste of money!' So I gave up smoking when I was 13."

Ann's father, **William Krummes**, was with the U.S. Forest Service, and the family moved back and forth between D.C. and the Denver area. Upon graduation from high school, she enrolled at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque to pursue an interest in genetics. While there, she attended a local Presbyterian church -- until she noticed more discrimination: "They made all the Chicanos and the Black people sit in the back." She walked out, never to return. "I had just HAD IT with all the crazy prejudice!"

After graduation, Ann took a job teaching biology at Rio Grande High School in Albuquerque. A married sorority sister set Ann up on a blind date with one of her husband's co-workers (both men filled tanker trucks at a local Chevron facility). It did not take Ann long to recognize in **Jack Bonnell** someone with whom she could build a life. In 1962, she and

Jack tied the knot. When she gave birth to their son **John** five years later, Ann decided to leave teaching to raise the children and at least "get them out of grade school." In 1969, daughter **Mary Ann** came along.

As the kids grew, Jack's career with Chevron rose, and multiple family moves followed (managed by Ann) -- Denver, Billings, Alamogordo and back to Denver again, where the Bonnells eventually settled for good. Ann, a certified lifeguard and water-safety instructor since age 15, volunteered for South Suburban Parks & Recreation, teaching challenged youngsters swimming, cross-country skiing and camping skills. She and Jack enjoyed time outdoors with John and Mary Ann, and a favorite spot was nearby Chatfield State Park.

Mary Ann says both her parents indulged the kids' passions, "and John and I were quite different, so it was not easy. I wanted to write a bird book and be the next **John James Audubon**, and John was into electronics and astronomy. But there was never any shutting down of horizons. I'm so grateful for that." For Mary Ann, bike rides, family camping trips and birding were best; for John, it was frequent visits to the Gates Planetarium. Young parents, take note: Today John is a rocket scientist and Mary Ann manages Visitor Services for Jefferson

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County Open Space.

I asked Ann which came first – her conservation activism or birding. “They really happened at about the same time, around 1985,” she replied. “The beaver incident was my first conservation crusade.” Wait – the *what?*

It was on a winter outing, on a trail along the South Platte River, that Ann and a friend came across a large clamshell-type trap, partly submerged in the shallows of an ice-ringed pond. Recognizing the obvious hazard for a child, pet or wild animal to be trapped and even drown, Ann immediately phoned the state wildlife division to raise the alarm. In short order, she convinced them to cease their use of lethal traps and use other methods to prevent beaver damage to trees. It was her first conservation battle, with more to come.

About the same time, Ann had signed up for the local Audubon chapter’s Beginning Birdwatching class, taught by eminent Colorado birders **Urling** and **Hugh Kingery**. On an outing with the Kingerys to Pence Park in Evergreen, Ann saw the “spark birds” that transformed her from just a nature enthusiast to an avid bird lover – a Blue Grosbeak and a Lazuli Bunting. Her interest grew quickly as she took more field trips, usually with Mary Ann along. As Ann’s birding skills grew, she schooled herself about birds’ food sources and then their habitat. “If you want to watch birds,” she says, “you’ve got to have a place for them to live!”

Ann also joined Tuesday Birders, an informal group led by longtime Colorado birder **Patty Echelmeyer**. They gathered every Tuesday morning, usually in a Jefferson County park or open space. There was (and still is) no formal membership, and only one requirement: Everyone chips in \$1 apiece. Whenever the pot reaches \$100, the group donates the money to a worthy, bird-related cause. When Patty stepped down as leader in 1984, Ann stepped up. After 30-plus years leading the group, she is in the process of handing over responsibility to **Cynthia Madsen** and **Dave Hill**.

Ann’s next crusade was to save the undeveloped south end of Ken Caryl Ranch in Jefferson County from future development. Jeffco voters had long since authorized a one-half percent sales tax to establish open space preserves across the county, but Ann knew they had yet to preserve any land below the foothills and Highway 285. So she set about convincing the

county of the compelling opportunity at Ken Caryl. Victory came in 1997 when Jefferson County Open Space purchased 919 acres of Ken Caryl to create South Valley Park. Later, Ann worked her way onto the Jeffco Open Space oversight board known as PLAN Jeffco.

By then, the Denver area’s growing population and water needs had stirred talk of expanding Chatfield Reservoir (and dramatically altering the state park and its wildlife habitat) so it could store more water. Already a volunteer lobbyist since 2003 for the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club, Ann began unpaid work on this issue for the Audubon Society of Greater Denver (now Denver Audubon) and others to prevent the destruction of one of metro Denver’s most important bird habitats. Soon, “Save Chatfield” bumper stickers were on cars all over town. By the time Audubon filed suit in 2014 to stop the project, Ann was on the club’s board. Four combative years later, Audubon’s last legal appeal was dismissed in federal court and the project was allowed to go forward.

“In the end, we got the crumbs,” Ann says, “but at least we saved some trees.” **Polly Reetz**, Denver Audubon’s conservation chair, confirms that the lawsuit did limit some of the damage to the park, and she credits “Ann’s activism, contacts, her knowledge of natural history, local government and conservation groups, and her commitment (as) instrumental to Denver Audubon’s conservation efforts.” Reetz says Ann’s work reached well beyond the spotlight of big causes: “I could always rely on Ann to respond to individuals who had 11th-hour emergency pleas for help with some habitat-destroying development in their neighborhood.”

Reetz adds that, even amid the ongoing conflict, Ann’s positive relationship with Chatfield State Park management enabled discussions that ultimately led to the housing of the Audubon chapter’s headquarters inside the park.

Woven throughout Ann’s birding and outdoor activism in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s were still more outdoor pursuits. She found time to volunteer at Roxborough State Park for 25 years, running the visitor center on weekends. Ann credits the park’s manager, **Susan Trumble**, as her mentor for habitat conservation ethics. Ann also coached the late **Margaret “Peg” Hayden**, a prominent mountain resident and landowner (great-granddaughter of territorial governor **John Evans**) who

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needed help meeting her obligations to the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas and the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Their collaboration would earn Ann the privilege of conducting the only guided bird counts across miles of private habitat inside sprawling Evans Ranch on the eastern slope of Mt Evans.

At some point, Ann joined the North Jeffco Parks & Recreation “Wild Women” club, becoming fast friends with outdoorswoman and club founder **Carolyn Adams**. For 20 years, they shared adventure travels with friends, including canoe trips down the Niobrara River in Nebraska. Later, Ann took over and guided the Niobrara trips herself through her 74th birthday. A number of Tuesday Birders made those trips with her. (As a Tuesday Birder myself, I must confess, to my lasting regret, that I never joined one of Ann’s trips.)

Throughout her years of activism and adventuring, Ann has supported organizations and causes of all kinds across the state, serving on a board here, a committee there, or simply offering advice from the sidelines. During our second chat, Ann showed me around her jam-packed office. The floor and chairs are piled with the evidence of her work, and the walls are covered with plaques and certificates from a host of appreciative organizations: the National Water Safety Congress, Sertoma, Sierra Club, the Environmental Protection Agency, Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Red Cross, Chatfield Arboretum, Audubon, Denver’s KCNC News 4 “Hometown Hero” award and more.

“Ann is a visionary!” says her friend, **Betty Glass**, also a longtime birder. “Ann always advocated for buffer areas between parks or open space and development, so that animals could move unimpeded.” She recalls how Ann had served on a board that oversaw rocket maker Martin Marietta as it worked to keep carcinogens from its rocket tests from seeping into the South Platte River watershed. “You might think Ann would be intimidated by those engineers,” Glass says, “but she often found holes in their strategies and, as Ann does, kindly helped them see their errors.”

For her 80th birthday in January 2019, the Tuesday Birders surprised Ann with a restaurant luncheon. The members all signed a huge, framed photo of Ann, wearing her perennial huge smile and holding a newly banded Bullock’s Oriole, about to set it free.

I remain in awe of this woman who lives her life with passion. I think of all those she has touched the way she has touched me -- sharing her knowledge, her humor, her love of people, birds and nature. Last year, the Colorado Field Ornithologists recognized Ann’s innumerable accomplishments and presented her CFO’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

I’d say that was a fitting capstone to her crusading career . . . except that I have a feeling Ann Bonnell’s crusading days are not yet behind her.



Top to bottom:
Portrait of Ann Bonnell
Ann with Susan Blansett
Ann with Tuesday Birders
Photos by Rob Raker

Birding by bike?

Yes you can, from casual rides to a “green” Big Year



Scott Somershoe in the field
Rob Raker

Scott Somershoe

You went birding ON YOUR BIKE? How far did you ride? What birds did you see? Did you have to stop about every 20 seconds? You got up HOW EARLY? Scott, are you NUTS?

Those are the kinds of questions I get when I tell people that I ride my bike not only for

fun and exercise, but also for birding. There is nothing more exciting and invigorating than taking a long ride during spring migration and riding along (and sometimes stopping) and hearing all the returning birds and their songs and calls. A bigger challenge is keeping a mental list of all the birds until I can stop and write them down. (And sometimes, I just ride and listen and don't stop!)

Am I the only person who does this?

Let me explain. Birding by bike is really an ideal marriage of two stimulating hobbies that share many similarities. Obviously, both involve the outdoors and exploring new places (or favorite hotspots or routes). Both provide some adrenaline rushes. Often, they also involve the same kind of pre-trip preparation. For either hobby, it helps having everything you need to succeed with you from the start – binoculars, scope, camera, and hat for birding; helmet, bicycle, eye protection, map/GPS, and spare tire for cycling, and water, sunscreen and snacks for both.

I've found that cycling brings a different perspective to birding. It takes some thought and planning you'd probably never consider when going by car or on foot. How do you carry your binoculars? Do you sling them over your shoulder? Or do you wear a small backpack to make cycling easier? (That's what I do.) When it's hot or you're going to be out for a few hours, how do you take enough water and still have room for binocs? What about a scope and tripod?

Logistics are important, but for me, the greatest thing about birding by bike is that anyone with a bike and an interest in birds can do it. Once you decide to do it, don't sweat the details. You'll just figure out how best to carry your gear – and then you can get started!

I have taken birding by bike a little more seriously this year, and some may argue that it's a bit extreme. I did a few cycling “big days” over the previous decade, but my serious birding by bike this year began because of the stay-at-home order in March as the coronavirus and Covid-19 cases rapidly spread. A more flexible job schedule (working at home, without a 25-minute office commute) and a greater ability to get out alone as my children are a bit older helped rekindle my love of cycling.

On a total whim in late March, I decided to chase a pair of uncommon birds – two Sagebrush Sparrows at Bear Creek Lake Park in Lakewood. The park is about 8 cycling miles one way from my house in Littleton. I put my binoculars in the rear pocket of my cycling jersey and rode over. Amazingly, I rolled up on my road bike and found the birds almost immediately. That evening I decided to see how many birds I can get this year without driving or burning fossil fuel. And so, my Green Big Year was born.

As the name implies, the Green Big Year includes birds found only in my yard or by walking or cycling from the house and back (whether to a specific destination or just on a familiar route across the neighborhood or town). Call it human-powered, or call it pedal-powered, it's a big year under my own power!

Nine months into this Green Big Year, I have learned that doing it poses an array of challenges en route to building that list of species. Even if you have phenomenal birding in your own yard (like the Black-throated Gray Warbler that landed in

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my yard last May) and in your local park (mine is Clement Park, which has seen at least 164 species), it does take time to ride to the birds. That time and effort can add up, especially if you're riding into the foothills. Going where the birds are will test your stamina and planning. It's not like just jumping into the car and driving to the latest rare bird alert. Working and being a dad to 3-year-old twin boys and a third-grade daughter (who I am teaching at home this year because of the pandemic) limits my ability to get out to bird and chase birds.

On top of all the logistical challenges, there are the puzzled stares, giggles and eye rolls at you, standing in the woods and glassing for an avian rarity while dressed in helmet, spandex jersey and cycling shorts.

Or many that's just self-conscious me.

Planning is everything. This Green Big Year in particular, I try for new species when I can and accept that I can't just pedal off into the sunrise for every rarity that shows up. Some days, I need to make pancakes for the kids. Juggling both has become my own personal challenge. I'm not breaking any green birding records that may be out there. I'm only setting personal records – and I am having a total blast.

Birding by bike can also be pretty extreme and intense. For example, I planned, scouted, and completed a Green Big Day in mid-May. I left my house at 3:30 a.m. and rode 7 miles uphill in Deer Creek Canyon to be at a great spot for the dawn chorus. I ended up riding 67 miles across Jefferson, Arapahoe, and a sliver of Douglas counties while tallying 123 species. But no, birding by bike doesn't have to be THIS intense!

If I haven't scared you off with all the huffing and puffing and planning and re-planning, I'll say it once more: Green Big Year or not, birding by bike can be as easy and relaxing as grabbing binoculars and riding to your local park. You might just be pedaling a mile away, but maybe you'll go farther than you'd normally walk. It may take a little organizing to load up a daypack with more than just water, snacks, and binoculars, but you also may find yourself pedaling through greenways, bike paths and routes all over town and exploring nooks and crannies you had never seen before – or maybe hadn't even been birded before!

I think birding while cycling changes your perspective of your town, your parks, and of the birds, too. It definitely gets you to new places and new experiences. I really love chasing by bike because I can just get there, no traffic jams, no burning fossil fuels, just me and the road or bike path and . . . pedal power!

If in doing so, you give the planet a break from pollution and traffic congestion, what's not to like? If I were a doctor, I'd write you this prescription:

Get on your bike and ride . . . and bird!

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*This is one in a series of monthly articles dedicated to exploring what conservation means to DFO – as a club, as birders and as citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. Birding with 20/20 Vision aims to inform and inspire us to do more to protect birds and their habitats. Have an idea for this series? Send it to **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com.*



BIRDING NEWS

SWA update: Non-hunter/ fisher passes and participation coming for birders, others



Susan Blansett and Roger Koester

Just two months after Colorado's new licensing requirement took effect for all public entry into State Wildlife Areas, efforts to create a separate access pass for birders and other non-hunter and non-angler users are bearing fruit.

At the Aug. 20 meeting of the Colorado Wildlife and Habitat Roundtable of "non-consumptive" users of state lands, Colorado Parks & Wildlife Director **Dan Prenzl**ow reported an important federal thumbs-up to the idea. He said the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has agreed that Colorado can charge a user fee to non-hunters/anglers and count them the way it does hook-and-bullet users without jeopardizing federal grant funds the state receives based specifically on its sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Details are still to be worked out, but Fish & Wildlife's acknowledgement that paid non-hunter/angler traffic in SWAs justifies matching grants is encouraging.

Further, Prenzl ow said at the Sept. 3 meeting of the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Commission that he wants to form a working group to have more far-reaching discussions about uses of SWA's and related State Trust Lands. He envisioned this group including Parks & Wildlife commissioners and staff and representatives of non-hunting and non-fishing groups. He said the group could have recommendations for the commission by its November meeting, with final action at the March 2021 meeting.

In advance of the meeting, DFO submitted the results of our member survey about SWA fees and licensing, which showed 75 percent of the 200+ responders support the idea of a separate "non-consumptive" permit or license. (See all the results and responses here: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-DVV5L8PB7/)

[results/SM-DVV5L8PB7/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-DVV5L8PB7/).) Prenzl ow read the results aloud to the commissioners, whose nods of agreement suggested appreciation for DFO's contribution to the discussion.

Colorado's 350 SWAs were originally established to preserve wildlife habitat and to provide places only for hunting and fishing because they were paid for by hunters and anglers via licenses and fees. Parks & Wildlife says SWAs' growing popularity for other outdoor recreation, including birding, has taxed the agency's ability to manage and protect them. That's why as of July 1, it began requiring all who enter SWAs to pay for and possess a valid hunting or fishing license. Proceeds from licenses and fees are the agency's main source of income.

Although birders, hikers, photographers, and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts who visit SWAs understand the need to pay (not unlike paying admission to use state parks), a number have objected to being counted as hunters or anglers, not as the alternative recreationists they are.

A DFO Conservation Committee member who monitored the Sept. 3 meeting noted a more inclusive tone toward non-hunting, non-fishing groups than in the past. Parks & Wildlife appears to recognize that while the primary purpose for SWAs is to preserve habitats and wildlife for hunting and fishing, it is now willing to include those who responsibly use the same habitat in other positive ways. The broadened discussion could lead to use surveys for each SWA and how its use has changed over time.

You can reach and follow the Parks & Wildlife Commission through the agency's website at <https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/CommissionMeetings.aspx>.

Smile! You'll be supporting DFO When you shop on Amazon

Patrick O'Driscoll

If you shop on Amazon.com, you are now able to help donate one-half of a percent (0.5%) of your purchases to Denver Field Ornithologists under the online marketplace's charitable giving program, [Amazon Smile](#).

Best of all, this costs you nothing. When you sign up once in Amazon Smile and designate “*Denver Field Ornithologists Inc*” as your preferred charity, Amazon will donate that percentage of the price of your purchases to DFO. The only requirement: When you're ready to check out, you must go to the Amazon Smile page to complete your transaction.



Eastern Kingbird
Cathy Olin

This means you can shop at amazon.com, Amazon Prime, the Amazon Smile page or any other way you normally interact with Amazon, adding items to your shopping cart as you go. The key is that sometime BEFORE you click on “**Proceed to Checkout**,” you need to be on the Amazon Smile page.

Before you shop, you'll need to sign up first (just once) in Amazon Smile to designate your charity. Start that one-time process at <https://smile.amazon.com>. Fill in the sign-up information, and when asked to pick your charity, type “**Denver Field Ornithologists Inc**” in the charity-name field and click “Select.”

In the future, every time you order, as long as you are in <https://smile.amazon.com> before checking out, your purchase confirmation message will display this note:

“You made a difference. Amazon will make a donation to Denver Field Ornithologists.”

Yes, one-half of 1 percent is literally half a penny on the dollar. But over time and with more participants, those “ha’pennies” can add up.

Don't forget: you must be on the Amazon Smile page when you complete your purchase or there will be no donation. You cannot restore a missing donation if you forget to make your purchase that way.



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

DFO NEWS

Coronavirus forces cancellation of Denver Christmas Bird Count for 2020

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MONTHLY PROGRAM

2-Wheelin' in the 5-Mile Radius

DFO PROFILE

On watercolor wings, field trip birds alight – and delight – on DFO's Facebook page

IMAGE OF THE MONTH >>

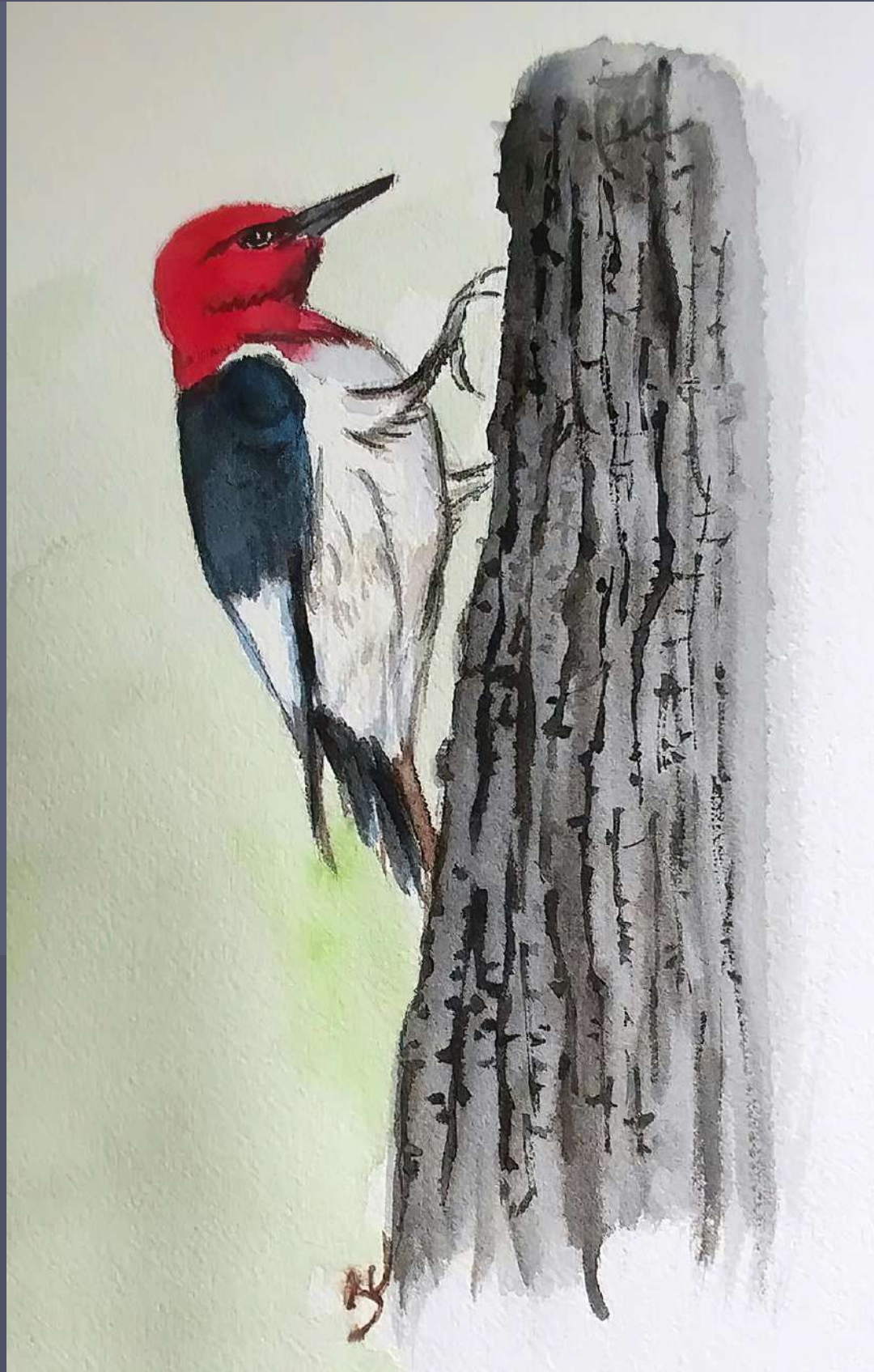
Red-headed Woodpecker



Joe Chen



Prewitt Reservoir
Merino, CO



Coronavirus forces cancellation of DFO-sponsored Christmas Bird Count for 2020



Patrick O'Driscoll

The annual Denver Christmas Bird Count in mid-late December has been canceled for 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. DFO member **Joey Kellner**, who coordinates and compiles the count within a 15-mile radius of locations in the western and southwestern metro area, announced his decision on Saturday, October 3.

"Thank you all for the thoughtful responses," Kellner said in an email to the volunteer birders who lead counting teams each year in more than 20 suburban sectors. Although two-thirds of those who responded to his previous poll said they were willing to lead again this year, Kellner made the call out of abundant caution about the spread of Covid-19.

"If one person came down with even a mild case, the concern to them and their families ESPECIALLY around the holiday season is JUST NOT WORTH it," Kellner wrote. "I would feel terrible if someone ended up in the hospital (or worse yet, in the hospital and on a ventilator) and missed the holidays with their loved ones."

He also noted that area count leaders "would be the ones responsible for enforcing" Covid-19 restrictions and precautions in the field: "I do not want to put any of my leaders into that potentially confrontational position" if any participant were to ignore or resist the safety guidance.

Kellner said he was also swayed by the advice of the National Audubon Society, which conceived and has led the annual count for more than 120 years. "National Audubon has stated, 'There will be little to no impact on the scientific value of the Christmas Bird Count by missing count season,'" Kellner wrote.

Audubon already had advised state and local count leaders that "we are living through unprecedented times" and that any counting in 2020 "will require a few changes if your count is to take place at all." It sent them new safety guidelines with two options: Go forward with a "safe and socially distanced CBC, if local rules allow," or if that weren't possible, "cancel this season's CBC for your location." Audubon also stressed that it "will fully support any compiler who decides to cancel their count for this year."

DFO became involved in the Denver CBC as a sponsor for the 2019 count by arranging and conducting area count outings like club field trips, with online signups on the DFO website. This allowed for easier and uniform registration and wider outreach to recruit participants. For administrative reasons, it also meant recruiting DFO field trip leaders either to lead area counts or to act as assistants for areas where counts were led by non-DFO members.

Kellner concluded his note by saying he hopes "you will all remain healthy and safe and be able to help with the 2021 Denver CBC. I need all of you!"

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

As migrating birds move out, DFO works to bring back field trips

Dave Hill

Birdie birdie, everyone! For weeks now, birds have been on the move as fall migration proceeds. Is it just me, or has “Here today, gone tomorrow” been replaced by “Here now, gone in about five minutes”? Or five seconds?

Two days ago, more than a hundred Common Grackles were foraging across my front yard and in the surrounding trees. To capture the moment, I grabbed my camera and raised the front window blinds. In that instant, that mob of sleek, noisy black birds didn’t just scatter – they vanished across the street and through the neighborhood beyond. Gone in seconds – wouldn’t you know it? How brief and fleeting are such moments for an avid birdwatcher.

But this reminds me of other more lasting joys that produce positive vibes and feel-good energy: The feeling you get when out in the open spaces of nature . . . that delicious anticipation when you’re planning to go birding . . . the fun you have among friends in the field. DFO’s many field trips helped us create such moments before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted everyone’s life. We are now working on plans to resume those field trips – soon, we hope – so DFO can again promote the warmth of socialization in person, the reinforcing thrill of shared bird sightings on DFO outings.

The annual DFO Field Trip Leader Forum in November was rescheduled this pandemic year for Saturday, Oct. 3 to seek consensus about how and when to restart the field trip program that hundreds and hundreds of you know and love. That meeting, remote and online via the Zoom teleconferencing service, took place as this new issue of *The Lark Bunting* went to press. We’ll give you a complete report in the next issue. The general consensus, however, was to plan for a slow reopening, but not before spring of 2021 at the earliest. (See story on page 2 of this issue about the decision to cancel the Denver Christmas Bird Count, of which DFO is a sponsor.)

As we have said before, the return most likely will be in smaller, carefully controlled outings, in accordance with any current state and local guidelines for Covid-19 safety. That would probably include continued distancing, mandatory masking, smaller trips size limits, and no carpooling except among safe units of family or household members.

But we wanted our field trip leaders to weigh in first. Reaching consensus meant discussing any differences in calm and respectful conversation. That’s why we set up the Oct. 3 forum. Once there is agreement with the Field Trip Committee and DFO Board on the details and especially the timing of a return, we can move forward. One way or another, you will hear from us soon. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, we continue to try our best to reach – and reach out – to you. We hope you are as pleased as we are with the use of Zoom to gather virtually. So far we have had two very successful DFO monthly evening programs. (Read the article on page 5 of this issue about the latest one – bird expert and field guide author Kenn Kaufman’s *Patterns of Bird Migration in North America and Beyond* program on Sept. 21). After strong response to the first of those programs in August (*eBird – Better Birding, Better Science* on Aug. 24), we boosted the size of our Zoom license to accommodate up to 500 participants and made it possible to broadcast live via YouTube video above that.

“Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the presentation with Kenn Kauffman,” Martha Eubanks wrote to us. Cynthia Madsen added: “I was able to leisurely eat dinner as I watched the program . . . It was like having company . . . and think of the fuel we saved!” Thank you both – and thanks to all the rest of you, too.

Cheers and chirps,
Dave



2-Wheelin' in the 5-Mile Radius

Chris Rurik
Monday, October 26
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

It's probably safe to say that in 2019, the "5-mile radius" (affectionately known as 5MR to its devotees) became a full-on birding fad. What is it? More importantly, why is it? At DFO's next monthly evening meeting, hear from one of 5MR's many adherents, a birder who spent years poking into the most "local of local" corners of Denver County looking for birds in the most marginal of habitats.

Former Denverite and DFO's own **Chris Rurik** will lead us through birding exploits near and . . . well, pretty *not* far. He will talk about the joy of getting to know the place you're in and the birding adventures possible right outside your front door – specifically, up to a "5-mile Radius" around your home. "I want to also focus on balance as a concept in birding and life -- and how making local birding a regular part of your routine is arguably more beautiful than going on extravagant outings or constantly visiting distant hotspots," Chris says.

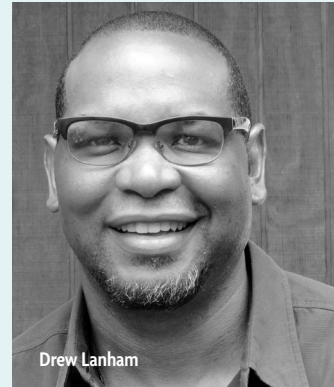
For years in Denver, he was a DFO director and an educator at Bluff Lake Nature Center, turning kids on to the joys of bugs and birds, building a community of birders and sharing new birding hotspots — often by bike. His DFO work included helping to write the "Better Birding with DFO" guide.

Growing up in Gig Harbor, WA, Chris was always into nature. But it was on a Puget Sound family farm named "Silverbow" by his great-grandfather that his passion for birds was sparked. With a borrowed hunting scope, he spotted and absorbed the beauty and wonder of a Common Loon. Soon he was devouring books about birding and volunteering for the local Christmas Bird Count. Fast-forward through his studies of English and geology at Stanford University and stints at Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Yellowstone NP. More recently, Chris has split time among Seattle, Anchorage and Fairbanks, working on a novel (writing is another passion).

Now, living once again on Silverbow Farm with his wife, **Mimi Chau**, and their new son, **George Madrone**, Chris has many personal projects, and his personal bird list for the Puget Sound area of Washington state just hit 134 when he logged a Northern Pygmy Owl.

As with DFO's past two evening programs, Chris will present via Zoom webinar technology. But this time, **no pre-registration is required**. To attend, simply go to the Programs & Events page on the DFO website — <https://dfobirds.org/Programs.aspx> — and click on "2 Wheelin' in the 5-Mile Radius" at about **7 p.m. MDT on Oct. 26**. If you have never used Zoom, set yourself up with a free Zoom account now so it will be easy to log in to this and future web programs. Find out more at <https://zoom.us/>.

COMING IN NOV . . .



Coloring the Conservation

Dr. J. Drew Lanham
Monday, November 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Lanham, a professor of wildlife ecology at Clemson University and author of *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*, will discuss what it means to embrace the full breadth of his African-American heritage and his deep kinship to nature and adoration of birds.

Lanham's life and career — blending ornithologist, college professor, poet, author and conservation activist — bring forward awareness of the natural world and our moral responsibility for it in new ways. Candid by nature — and because of it — Lanham will examine how conservation must be a rigorous science and an evocative art, inviting diversity and race to play active roles in celebrating our natural world.

Look for the Zoom details for attending Lanham's web-based live presentation in November in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Bird expert Kaufman's take on migration: A crazy quilt of endless variation



Patrick O'Driscoll

All right, fellow birders: If “fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly,” as the hit song from Broadway’s *Show Boat* goes, then birds gotta fly north in spring and south in winter, right?

It ain’t necessarily so, according to **Kenn Kaufman**, the esteemed birder, field guide author and avian portrait painter. “The reality is far more complicated than that,” he told a record DFO audience of almost 350 in our club’s Sept. 21 evening program via Zoom teleconference. Sprinkling his wide-ranging presentation with migration observations and details about more than 30 bird species, Kaufman spent the better part of an hour explaining how the whole process is rather logical – and very fascinating.

After an introduction by friend and DFO board member **Sharon Tinianow**, Kaufman began his “[Patterns of Bird Migration in North America and Beyond](#)” program by noting, “There are hardly any birds that follow such a simple pattern” of straight-north, straight-south migration on our continent. Rather, there are “endless” variations, nearly as many as there are species. Geography and timing are key to all of them.

To view the complete video of Kenn Kaufman’s program, go to DFO’s “Programs and Events” archive at <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>.

Speaking from his home in northern Ohio, Kaufman touched both keys when he singled out a fall migrant familiar to Coloradans, the Rufous Hummingbird. This tiny nectar-lover meanders between its main wintering grounds in southern Mexico and breeding grounds in the Pacific Northwest. Rufouses time their trip north in late winter-early spring to cross the Southwest just when desert wildflowers are blooming. They return south in summer by first going east, where high-country wildflowers in mountain meadows (including the Colorado Rockies) are peaking. “In every season they’ve got lots of food available,” Kaufman said. “It’s really a strategy . . . just the right place at the right time.”

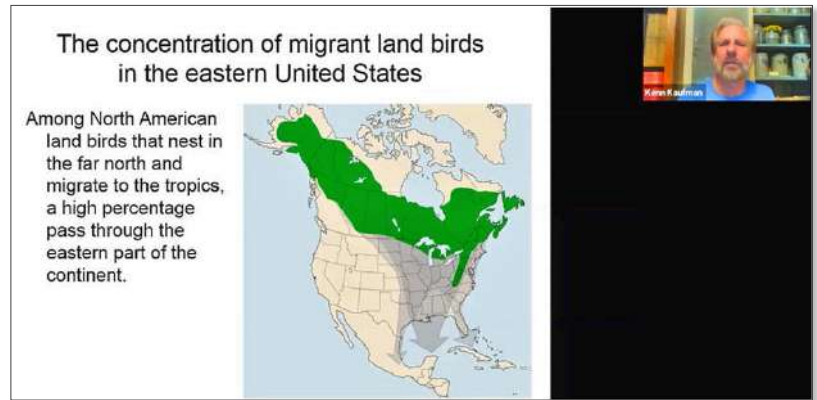
I admit I was surprised when Kaufman next declared, “There are more species of birds in the West than there are in the East.” Then, his explainer: “But in terms of actual migration, there are more migratory land birds passing through eastern states than through the West.” That means more year-round variety for us here in Colorado and more migrating species where he lives in the Midwest. How come?

“If you look at geography, often it isn’t possible for migrants to travel in a straight line,” he said, “and often it wouldn’t be a good idea.” Mountains can and do facilitate easier migration for hawks and other soaring birds that catch updrafts along ridges. But they also tend to block many species that breed far north and west in Canada and the Arctic and can’t simply point south and go. These “eastern” birds, from warblers to shorebirds, must first return east, then turn south to get around the mountains that define the western half of North America all the way down through Mexico.

Kaufman said that also means most of them migrate much farther than most western species. Again, that’s because so many breed far north and as far west as the Canadian Rockies. On one of his presentation slides, he portrayed their breeding footprint as a vast green swath across most of Canada and Alaska: “So many of the things we think of as eastern birds are both eastern and northern.”

Continued on page 6

Kaufman suggested an instructive exercise with your field guide: Compare migration routes between similar western and eastern U.S. species – Western and Scarlet Tanager, for instance, or Bullock’s and Baltimore Oriole, Lazuli and Indigo Bunting, Black-headed and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, or Ash-throated and Great Crested Flycatcher. The eastern species’ migrations are farther because of the geography of the Americas. Western birds generally tend to end up in Mexico and Central America, while more eastern birds end up in South America.



Although we see fewer big migrations in the West, geography and happenstance bestow one benefit on us, especially here on the eastern edge of the Rockies. With all those eastern migrants breeding far north and west, “a lot of them stray west in migration,” Kaufman said. “If you’re out in Colorado or other western states during migration and looking for a vagrant, you have a really good chance of finding one.” (Witness this fall’s Front Range birding turnout for rarities like Buff-breasted Sandpiper and those vivid orange-and-gray Nelson’s Sparrows that showed up in late September at Cherry Creek State Park.)

Kaufman’s conversational, easy-going good humor on camera made it easy to imagine soaking up his migration insights on a field trip together. Despite decades doing this, he appeared as enthusiastic as a birding newbie on his first field trip.

He ran through a litany of birds that perform “amazing feats of endurance and survival and navigation” in migration, from nonstop 80-hour flights by Blackpoll Warblers to the unpredictable, freeform migration of White-winged Crossbills, which may never breed twice in the same place, or even in the same season. Kaufman noted that the Bar-tailed Godwit, fattened up before migrating, burns muscle and “even some of its internal organs” in the long-distance ordeal. Some little warblers power north across the Gulf of Mexico in 18 hours nonstop. Other birds find their way back thousands of miles not just to the same place, but the same tree.

In short, bird migration “is just utterly remarkable,” he said. “The more I learn about the science of this, the more magical it seems.” For that reason, Kaufman said migratory birds deserve not just our respect, but our help. Besides protected nesting and wintering habitat, they need migration “stopover sites” in between for food, water and rest. That requires cooperation among nations and states, “because (birds) are a shared resource and a shared treasure that we all have.”

Watching Kaufman live on Zoom was the largest audience ever for a DFO program. In attendance via computer, pad or smartphone were 346 people, though a total of 505 actually registered. Curious about the large number of no-shows, DFO emailed a short survey to those who registered but did not attend. The club will use their feedback to fine-tune how we conduct future online programs and webinars. Besides those who either forgot or could not attend because of other priorities, some either did not receive the Zoom link or could not find it when it was time for the program.

For future webinars, DFO will reconsider the requirement for registration in advance. We may simply post on the DFO website a link to the Zoom program. We will also send email reminders to the DFO mailing list the day before the program. If you are not a DFO member but want notice of our web programs, you can create a free account on the DFO website at this address: <https://dfobirds.org/Accounts/CreateAccount.aspx>. And if you have not already done so, set yourself up with a free Zoom account now so it will be easy to log in to future web programs. Find out more at <https://zoom.us/>.

Continued on page 7

Heeerrre, warbler-warbler-warbler . . .

Patrick O'Driscoll

Known to sprinkle jokes and humor into his talks, **Kenn Kaufman** opened his DFO program with a literal shaggy-dog story involving his pet – and the names of two very rare birds. Without a live audience to punctuate it with laughter, it lost a little oomph in the retelling. But Kaufman can still tell a funny story.

"I was surprised to have been invited to speak to Denver Field Ornithologists," he began, "because the last time I was in the Denver area, I caused a lot of trouble Actually, it wasn't my fault, it was the fault of my dog . . . this big, floppy-eared mongrel type, loves everybody, and his name is **Kirtland's Warbler**."

"That name might sound familiar. There's actually a bird that goes by the same name. I don't know why, of all the things they could've used to name this bird, I don't know why they had to name it after my dog," Kaufman deadpanned.

Kirtland's, of course, is "maybe the rarest songbird in North America" and rarely seen, "so it's a real sort of grail bird, and people are really excited about seeing it," he went on, describing its tiny breeding range in Michigan and non-linear fall migration to the Bahamas. Then Kaufman returned to his story.

"I came out to the Denver area . . . DFO was holding this big event out at Barr Lake. Birders from all over Colorado and surrounding states were gathered there . . . We had been driving for hours, and when we got there, my dog was tired of being all pent up in the car. So he leaped out and went bounding away and I had to call for him to come back."

Raising his voice to a dog-calling shout, Kaufman continued:

"Like, 'HEY, KIRTLAND'S WARBLER! KIRTLAND'S WARBLER, over HERE! KIRTLAND'S WARBLER!' . . . And all these birders came running up from all directions! And I thought, 'Man, these people really like dogs!' But then it occurred to me that they thought I had found the bird, the Kirtland's Warbler."

Straight-faced, Kaufman delivered his punch line: "I just really felt so bad about that, to have disappointed people that much, that I made the extreme sacrifice — I renamed my dog. I named him . . . **Ivory Gull**."

Rimshot!

DFO AdBIRDtisements!

DFO members may now submit free advertisements and announcements to *The Lark Bunting* to sell or seek to purchase birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, etc.). This includes materials offered for donation.

- Advertisements may include descriptions of merchandise for sale or being sought, including condition and asking price
- Ads must include full name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a website link if merchandise or items are being offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit ads for inappropriate content or excessive length (50-word limit; no accompanying photos or artwork, please)
- Ads will not carry over month-to-month. To renew, you must resubmit
- This service is free – but it is available *only* to DFO members
- **Advertising deadline is the last weekday of each month** (except June; *The Lark Bunting* does not publish a new issue in the month of July)

To place a DFO "AdBIRDtisement" or if you have questions, contact **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, by email at patodrisk@gmail.com. Please include the words "DFO ADVERTISEMENT" in email subject field.

Next advertising deadline: Friday, October 30

Welcome to new DFO members:

Ronald Palizzi of Lakewood, and Linda Olson and Michael Serruto of Aurora

Thanks for contributing to Friends of DFO and the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund:

Linda Olson and Michael Serruto



DFO PROFILE

On watercolor wings, field trip birds alight – and delight – on DFO’s Facebook page

Patrick O’Driscoll

Visit the Denver Field Ornithologists Facebook page, and you’re sure to get a fix of bird photography. Daily and weekly, our club’s many shutterbugs post whole flocks of fine bird pictures on DFO’s busiest social media platform.

On occasion, though, you’ll see something else amidst all the digital winged imagery: Simple watercolors of birds, one at a time. Something in those painted pictures – from flycatchers and woodpeckers to ducks and egrets – catches the eye in a different way. They give off an air of calm, subtle grace that feels almost Zen-like.

That impression is no accident. The artist, DFO member and birder **Joe Chen**, grew up learning centuries-old Chinese styles of painting in his native Taiwan. Since joining DFO in 2018, he has been producing and sharing his visions of birds he has seen on DFO field trips. Within an hour or two of returning from an outing, he paints one of the birds he saw on the trip and posts it to the DFO Facebook page – more than 112 paintings and counting.

“I just draw and paint the birds for fun, and to record what we saw on the trip,” Chen says. He posts them for the same reason most photographers post their bird photos: “To share the joy and wonder of the birds we saw.”

Chen uses a modified form of a technique called Chinese ink painting. This style emphasizes “painting from one’s heart and mind, minimum strokes, not to repaint on top of the paint,” he says. “Simplicity is one of the keys.” Even though Joe paints birds mostly in watercolor, he uses the ink-painting approach, which also emphasizes the “blank white” space around the principal image.

Continued on page 9

Look closely: Many of his works also include simple and graceful Chinese script, painted in red, in one corner. “It is the name of the bird or its family,” he explains, expressed in ancient characters that date back to the time of China’s first emperor.

Simplicity also describes Joe’s painting setup. His “studio” is the dining-room table of his Green Valley Ranch home. “I must finish it before my wife starts to complain,” he jokes. Perhaps that’s why Joe usually completes his field-trip paintings soon after getting home from the field.

Chen posted his first field-trip bird painting the month he joined DFO. It was of two nuthatches, White-breasted and Pygmy, on the same tree, painted after a June 23, 2018 field trip to Genesee Mountain Park led by **Karen Drozda**. (Joe saw the Red-headed Woodpecker on the cover of this issue of the newsletter on an Aug. 25, 2019 DFO trip to Prewitt Reservoir led by **Joey Kellner**.)

In the field, DFO birders may recognize Joe from his trademark floppy hat and quiet bearing on the birding trail. When his sharp eye catches sight of a bird, however, he’ll speak up, usually with the correct ID.

What fellow field trippers won’t see is a sketchpad or easel. Chen works entirely from memory and the occasional snapshot, with field guides as his backup. “I try to memorize the posture, main features, and the environment that I saw from the trip. Unless it’s a bird that I am very familiar, I use field guides as reference when I paint so that I won’t miss the main features.”

Joe wasn’t a birder when he began painting as a kid, but his school exercises laid unforeseen groundwork. “In Chinese painting classes, we painted lots of sparrows,” he says, “because like bamboo, orchids and plum flowers, sparrows are one of the ‘basic’ subjects in Chinese painting.” When he adds, “I can paint a sparrow within three minutes,” he’s not kidding.

Art training began in middle school, but Chen was exposed earlier. “I was the son a very good amateur painter, a much better one than I am,” he says. His father was captain of a cargo ship, based in the northern Taiwanese port city of Keelung, where Joe was born. Captain Chen painted landscapes of what he saw from his vessel as he traveled the world. The son shares the father’s love of landscape painting.

Once out of high school, however, Joe stopped making art. College studies in mechanical engineering absorbed his time. And after graduation, his girlfriend **Lucia** (who would soon become his wife) introduced him to an entirely new pastime – birding. When they were still in Taiwan, Lucia liked to bird where she worked – Taiwan’s [Yushan National Park](#). Joe was mostly a solo, backyard birder. It wasn’t until he joined DFO that he regularly went on bird outings with other people.

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Postgraduate studies brought him to America in 1985 to complete his master's degree in mechanical engineering at the University of Michigan. After marrying Lucia in Taiwan, he returned to take jobs in Silicon Valley as a product design engineer in the computer hard-disc drive field. Eventually tiring of the Bay Area traffic, Chen and his family moved to Colorado in 1999 for a similar job. (Joe and Lucia have four grown children, all born in California -- three daughters and a son.)

"I used to make some drawings for my kids as storytelling when they were young," he says, noting that two of his children grew up loving to paint and one even majored in art in college. But it took a cold and lonely work assignment in Minnesota in 2012 to return Joe to the artist's easel.

"I moved to Minnesota by myself for the new job," he recalls, "and there was not much to do in the small town called Hutchinson where I lived. So I started to paint again." He was still birding, still mostly in his backyard -- but the backyard birds there included Pileated Woodpeckers and swans nearby. After two years of Minnesota cold, he returned to Colorado for good.

Joe loves the paintings of John James Audubon ("really pioneer and good guide for us") and is inspired by field guide illustrator **David Sibley**. In his own painting style, Chen is a huge fan of the famous Chinese painter **Lin Fon Ming** (1900-1991), whose name also is spelled **Lin Fengmian**. "Lin Fon Ming is like the Chinese **Joan Miró**," he says, referring to the acclaimed Spanish surrealist painter and sculptor. "They both paint with simple but pure heart."

Chen keeps dozens of portfolios of his bird artwork, arranged by species families. But except for Facebook, he doesn't display them. "I am a very low-key person and too busy with the job" to exhibit his work or compete in art shows. "I only submitted my art works for juried shows twice in my life so far. Once when I was in grade school, I painted a water buffalo and won an all-state honorary mention. The second time was for an Arvada community show with a landscape painting." He mentions only casually that he won best-in-show in that one: "It was kind of surprise for me."

Although DFO field trips have been on hold for more than six months because of Covid-19, Joe still paints birds from his solo outings. Last month he posted a bright watercolor of the rare Vermilion Flycatcher that showed up unexpectedly along Sand Creek near Denver's Bluff Lake Nature Center.

"After the pandemic happened, I was able to find more birds in my backyard than before," Chen says. "I tried my best to continue to go bird watching by myself, but I think the best thing is learning from both the leader and other birders. I really miss the DFO field trips."

Just like we miss those new DFO field-trip bird paintings from you, Joe.

Images page 8 top to bottom: Vermilion Flycatcher, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, American Avocet (Joe Chen)

Images page 9 top to bottom: Blackburnian Warbler (Joe Chen), Joe Chen (Patrick O'Driscoll), Brandt (Joe Chen), Chen in his studio

DFO NEWS

Bird books fly at DFO giveaway

Over the years, members who are moving, retiring, downsizing or de-cluttering have donated bird-related books to Denver Field Ornithologists. In the time before the Covid-19 pandemic, DFO displayed these books as giveaways (with a suggested donation of any amount to the club) each month on a table at the back of the room at in-person evening programs.

With no monthly outlet to move the growing inventory, DFO members **Tom and Mary Cay Burger** and **Karen Drozda** set up a table full of free giveaway books Sept. 12 at the annual Fall Birding Festival at Barr Lake State Park.

"We gave away books and told people about birding and DFO," Mary Cay Burger said. "One family that was homeschooling their children were especially grateful for books about other countries. We left the Spanish language bird books for the Spanish-speaking bird group that was meeting that afternoon." The DFO team also signed up several people interested DFO's free Zoom program featuring **Kenn Kaufman** nine days later.

She added that all but six books were given away, and the club will cease taking further book donations until in-person meetings resume again, probably in 2021.

With a stack of old *Colorado Bird Notes*, a peek at our club's past . . . and more

Hello, I was a member of the club back in the 1950s. I am cleaning out my home and found a bunch of Colorado Bird Notes from the mid fifties. I have a pile about an inch thick and would be happy to donate them if there is anyone interested in them for historical purposes . . .

The email from Larry Crowley of Louisville arrived in mid-September, offering several years of the mimeographed monthly newsletter of the Colorado Bird Club. When Crowley joined in 1954, the club was still a decade away from becoming Denver Field Ornithologists. That name change helped facilitate creation of the statewide Colorado Field Ornithologists in 1964-65 and end any confusion over the two clubs' names.

DFO quickly accepted Crowley's offer with thanks. In chatting further, it quickly became apparent Crowley had a fascinating story to tell – not only about the life of our club more than 65 years ago, but also of his own life with birds.

A retired middle school teacher, Crowley began birding at that same school age – but he fell in love with raptors at the same time. A birder in his New Jersey youth, he grew up to become a master falconer, training hawks and falcons for hunting and banding them for fun and science. This Q-and-A is an edited transcript of The Lark Bunting's conversation with Larry Crowley, now 84.

— *Patrick O'Driscoll*

The Lark Bunting: You were in DFO before it was DFO . . .

LARRY CROWLEY: Yes, when it was the Colorado Bird Club. I was a member twixt 1954 and roughly the early '60s, when the Army got me. I joined the club when I was studying biology at CU. I took a couple of courses in ornithology from **Gordon Alexander**, who was head of the Biology Department.

TLB: Tell us more about *Colorado Bird Notes*.

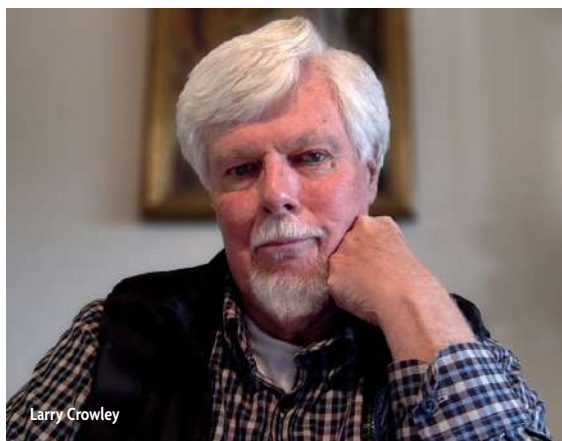
LC: I looked forward to it every month. The newsletter carried records of who saw what where. Whatever was going on, they'd write it up. They had four or five pages of news from Boulder, from Denver, even from Weldona. Nobody knew where the hell Weldona was, but we had **Howard Rollin's** "Weldona Notes." I don't recall what he wrote, but I do remember he was quite a painter. He gave paintings to the club of whatever songbirds he had out there in Weldona. You could actually check them out, like at a library, and hang them in your house.

DFO today is mainly about field trips. What was the club like in the '50s?

It was definitely field trip-oriented. One of the really fun things to do was these "big day" counts in May to see how many species we could get, trying to beat everybody else. We'd start out at midnight in the dark, maybe to try for a Great Horned Owl or Burrowing Owl. I had one of my more memorable birding moments one of those nights.

We were starting our big day out at the old Lowry bombing range, and I stepped on a rattlesnake in the dark! How did I know? Because what I stepped on squirmed and then rattled. I was straight up in the air before I could think about it. And before I landed, I had already decided to get away as far and as fast as I could from that spot.

Continued on page 12



Larry Crowley



Young falconer
Crowley in 1960s

SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST *cont from page 11*

I remember at one meeting they wheeled in a stoop-shouldered member with a beard like **John Muir's**, a 90-plus-years-old Denver ornithologist named **Horace Smith**, who had been studying birds since before the turn of the century. He just loved to come to these bird things. And then there was the Christmas Bird Count of 1955. I went out with the famous **Thompson Marsh** himself. It was snowing like crazy, so we didn't see much. But I remember that everybody still got together to add up our birds. It was just warm and welcoming. I also remember a guy named **Don Thatcher**. I had a pair of 7x50 Zeiss binoculars and a 20-power Bausch + Lomb telescope. (I've still got both.) When Don saw my hand-held telescope, he built me an adapter so that I could fasten it to a tripod.

How did you become interested in birds?

Somewhere around seventh grade, when I was 12, I was sent off for a month to summer camp near Dover, NJ. One of the kids at camp had a [Peterson Field Guide](#). That summer I got really interested in nature. I went out on field trips. I became fascinated when I saw a Cedar Waxwing nest.

In high school I'd be out birding every chance I got. I even got some of my buddies into it. We went down to Cape May, NJ, which of course was just incredible. Then there was the Urner Ornithological Club [named for famed Depression-era New Jersey ornithologist **Charles A. Urner**]. These guys were serious birders! The day I took a bus over there to Newark, NJ, they had a contest among themselves. They opened these specimen drawers and pulled out skins of birds from everywhere in the world to see who among their members could identify them correctly. I thought, "These are my people"!

I even got to see **Roger Tory Peterson** once. It was in 1950, and Audubon was marking the centennial of **John James Audubon's** death. Mom took me over to a celebratory event at the Audubon Society of New York. I saw some of Audubon's original paintings there. I remember one painting – it was either an Ivory-billed or Pileated Woodpecker – that somebody had shot through with an arrow. Imagine! An original Audubon painting with a couple of arrow holes in it.

So, then you came to Colorado for college?

We moved here. My dad died when I was a junior in high school in Union, NJ. After his death, Mom, who was from Kansas, said, "I hate the East." So in March 1954, she flew out to Colorado to see Boulder. She'd heard it was a pretty little town with a nice college. Four months later, we drove out. I lived at home and walked to school at CU.

How did you get into falconry?

There was a nature center called the [Trailside Museum](#) in Mountainside, NJ. It consisted of a log building with a terrarium (frogs and salamanders and such), surrounded outside by several gazebos with caged live animals. One of them had an American Kestrel in it. When they closed for the winter, they farmed the animals out to people to keep them until spring. They asked if I'd like to take in that kestrel. I was 15 years old! With that first bird, I was hooked. When I took her back the next spring, somebody had brought them another kestrel. "We've got two. Do you want her?" they asked. "Oh, YES!" I replied.

Continued on page 13

The museum was next to a ridge that hawks followed in migration. Some of the best days of my young life were standing atop a tower on that ridge, watching hawks go by in the fall. They came through by the thousands. I counted them for the government: How many Coops, how many Sharpies, how many Broad-wings?

So you continued your hobby into adulthood?

I was and always will be a falconer, so raptors were and continue to be my love. It's a little like training a dog to hunt. You're its partner. First you teach them to tolerate your presence. You give them food to reward desired behavior, and they learn how to hunt with you. You go hunting with them and train them to return to you. It's always their choice. In the 1960s, as president of the newly founded Colorado Hawking Club, I helped write the laws and the test for falconers to take and hunt with raptors. Until then, some of these birds were totally unprotected. In those days people could capture or kill all the peregrines and accipiters they wanted.

In 1961, the Army drafted me and sent me to Germany. While in college, I had sent a prairie falcon to a friend of a friend in Germany, and it happened that he lived in the same town where I was stationed. So I could go hawking on the weekends with my new friend. (We caught partridges and pheasants.) When my three years were up, the Army offered to send me home free up to a year later if I took my discharge in Europe. So I hitchhiked all over Europe with three New Zealand girls. At the end of the summer, they were going to Rhodesia and asked if I wanted to come. What could I say? I went to Cape Town and hitchhiked back. I kept a journal, and about 10 years ago I wrote a book about it – *A Young Falconer's Walkabout: Hitchhiking Through Europe and Africa in the Sixties*. I also trapped falcons in Sudan and took them to England.

And when you came home?

I became a schoolteacher in 1965 and taught for roughly 50 years – junior high school science, some high school, and a multiyear gig as a substitute in damned near everything. I also had two kids, both of whom also have biology degrees. One is a professor in Cincinnati who works with, among other things, lemurs, and even some hawks.

I quit teaching when I hit age 80, but I'm still busy. Currently, I help **Janet Chu** (*Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range*) with butterfly surveys for Boulder County. It's low-key but fun. We call ourselves "birders gone bad."

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*Denver Field Ornithologists turns 85 in 2020. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting is publishing "Snippets from DFO's Past" – personal remembrances, member stories, photos, bits of club history and trivia, and the like. Please share YOUR "Snippets" stories, photos or memories from ANY era. Email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!*

Amazon Smile supports DFO with every purchase

If you shop on Amazon.com, you are now able to help donate one-half of a percent (0.5%) of your purchases to Denver Field Ornithologists under the online marketplace's charitable giving program, [Amazon Smile](#).

Best of all, this costs you nothing. When you sign up once in Amazon Smile and designate "*Denver Field Ornithologists Inc*" as your preferred charity, Amazon will donate that percentage of the price of your purchases to DFO. The only requirement: When you're ready to check out, you must go to the Amazon Smile page to complete your transaction.

This means you can shop at amazon.com, Amazon Prime, the Amazon Smile page or any other way you normally interact with Amazon, adding items to your shopping cart as you go. The key is that sometime BEFORE you click on "**Proceed to Checkout**," you need to be on the Amazon Smile page.

Before you shop, you'll need to sign up first (just once) in Amazon Smile to designate your charity. Start that one-time process at <https://smile.amazon.com>. Fill in the sign-up information, and when asked to pick your charity, type "**Denver Field Ornithologists Inc**" in the charity-name field and click "Select."

In the future, every time you order, as long as you are in <https://smile.amazon.com> before checking out, your purchase confirmation message will display this note:

"You made a difference. Amazon will make a donation to Denver Field Ornithologists."

Yes, one-half of 1 percent is literally half a penny on the dollar. But over time and with more participants, those "ha'pennies" can add up.

Don't forget: you must be on the Amazon Smile page when you complete your purchase or there will be no donation. You cannot restore a missing donation if you forget to make your purchase that way.



BIRDING WITH 20/20 VISION

Western wildfires: What if birds can't see . . . or breathe?

Roger Koester

We know from our own experience the effects that this year's widespread western wildfires – from the Pacific Coast states through Colorado – are having on us humans. We can't see the mountains (or the cities). We awake to air that smells like there's a campfire nearby. We have health warnings to avoid any significant exertion.

But how does this affect our avian friends, especially as they migrate now?

I decided to pursue this topic through a trusty web search. I was able to piece together the following information, which partially answers the question of what wildfires are doing to birds. In a Sept. 11, 2020 article on the [National Audubon Society website](#), I found this:

*Assuming birds escape a fire, smoke might still affect their health in ways that aren't very well understood. "We do know that exposure to particulate matter, which of course is of great concern for human health, can affect birds as well," says **Olivia Sanderfoot**, a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow at the University of Washington Seattle who studies how air pollution affects birds. For example, veterinarians and poultry scientists who study captive birds have found that smoke can damage lung tissue and leave the animals susceptible to potentially lethal respiratory infections.*

In some cases, smoke inhalation might make it harder for birds to flee onrushing flames. Thick smoke, for instance, may have contributed to the deaths of 50 adult White Ibises during a 1999 fire in the Everglades, Sanderfoot reported in a recent paper. And some low-flying species might succumb to smoke inhalation or exhaustion before they can escape forest fires, according to the Alberta (Canada) Institute for Wildlife Conservation.

Continued on page 15

We're all familiar with the "canary in the coal mine" story. It is particularly true because birds have a more fragile respiratory system than ours, according to wildlife biologists. So, if we're feeling out of breath on a bad air day, imagine the effects on the much smaller respiratory systems of birds.

I was also curious about how the recent wildfires, with their intense heat and smoke and devastating aftermaths, might affect bird migration, which is now underway across the West. Once again, definitive research has not yet been published, but anecdotal evidence from Canada to Southern California speaks to a considerable decline in the normal migrating bird populations. An Oct. 20, 2019 article, "Threats to Migrating Birds," on [*The Spruce*](#), a home improvement website, yielded this passage:

Different birds face different threats along their journeys, but all birds have to endure some risks as they migrate. [Some of] the most common and most deadly threats to migratory birds include the following:

Exhaustion: *Birds may fly hundreds of miles during migration, often covering large distances without rest. Exhaustion can make birds less wary of potential threats, and tired birds are more apt to collide with obstacles or falter in flight. This is especially true if their flight path passes through storms or unfavorable wind patterns, or if birds are migrating later in the season and must cover more ground each day to reach their destination. [The massive wildfires in the West have undoubtedly forced birds to alter their normal migration routes.]*

Starvation: *Inadequate food supplies cause starvation among migrating birds every year. This may be caused by habitat destruction that effectively strands migrating birds without food along their route, or it can be due to greater feeding competition among large flocks of migratory birds.*

Natural Disasters: *Hurricanes, blizzards, wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters can destroy crucial stopover and rest sites as well as destroy food sources birds need to refuel along their journeys. Birds that are caught in these disasters can suffer other effects that cause injury, debilitation, or death, such as singed feathers in a wildfire or freezing in an early or late blizzard.*

We've all heard speakers and read articles or books that postulate how birds use Earth's electromagnetic fields and/or their own internally programmed navigation systems to make their migratory journeys. In addition, scientists believe migrating birds may use the stars and sun to navigate, as well as wind patterns and landforms or landmarks. If the sun and stars and landmarks are obscured by wildfire smoke, however, normal navigation may be disrupted. This could easily result in much longer or more errant migration routes, contributing to exhaustion. And, if birds are passing through an area they have not used before, they may face competition for food from local species and other migrants, or they may not even find sufficient food suitable to them.

Although current research has not yet answered many of our questions about the effects of wildfire on birds and their migration, it is safe to say that climate change – and the increased frequency and intensity of wildfires because of it – is having and will continue to have some negative effect.

Birds demonstrate an amazing ability to adapt. We can only hope their adaptation will protect them from substantial harm.

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*This is one in a series of monthly articles in 2020 dedicated to exploring what conservation means to DFO – as a club, as birders and as citizens of metro Denver and Colorado. Birding with 20/20 Vision aims to inform and inspire us to do more to protect birds and their habitats. Have an idea for this series? Send it to **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com*



Colleen Nunn (pink mask) at Westerly
(Susan Blansett)

DFO: THE POWER OF ONE

At Lowry's Westerly Wetlands, practicing "The Power of One" for the birds

Susan Blansett

We've all probably seen the memes and heard the phrase "The Power of One," referring to the difference one person can make in a situation, in another person's life, in a community or the world. But it's easy to think, "That can't happen to *me*."

Let me tell you how it happened to one DFO member who, with a little effort and a single act, has begun to bring positive change to birds and habitat near her home.

It was clear at our first meeting last year of DFO's new Conservation Committee that **Colleen Nunn** was passionate about Westerly Wetlands. She came armed with information about this bird-friendly place in Denver's Lowry neighborhood, the former Air Force base where Denver and Aurora are separated by Alameda Avenue. An artificial but natural-looking wetland (officially called Aurora-Kelly Reservoir), it was built next to a former landfill. The reclaimed dump is now the proposed site for a large, multifamily residential development that will begin construction in 2027.

Nunn expressed her concern about how hundreds of new homes and thousands of new residents (and their pets) could affect the wetlands and the many wild species that depend on it for nesting and feeding, especially in spring migration. A self-identified



Lowry Aviator birding story

Continued on page 17



PICTURE THIS: YOUR PHOTOS IN THE LARK BUNTING

We've asked you before, and we're here to ask again: Send us your excellent Colorado bird photos for *The Lark Bunting*!

For the high-profile cover of our monthly newsletter, we seek great photos – in color, nicely lit, sharply focused – of the birds we see in our state in the course of the year. Whatever the bird(s) or the situation, we'd love to see your shots. They could be the cover photo, or perhaps inside with an article that features your subject bird . . . or maybe just as a stand-alone photo.

Here are the particulars:

Photographers must be members of Denver Field Ornithologists (if you are not but want to submit, go to the DFO website's [membership page](#) first to join the club!)

Photographers are asked to submit original, unedited photo files – not yet sized or cropped. If you're not sure, contact **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, at jcesten@gmail.com and he can explain.

Send your photos and your questions to photo editor Jim at the same address. Thanks!

THE POWER OF ONE *cont from page 16*

crusader, Colleen contemplated how to raise awareness about Westerly among the legions who recreate on the open space around the wetland. "I knew that actually fighting the development may not be realistic," she said, "so I was just looking for ways to get people to care about Westerly."

The place was ripe for a little consciousness raising. Some negligent dog walkers regularly let their pets race down the dam past the "DOGS MUST BE LEASHED" signs to splash into the water, scattering the waterfowl. Joggers and cyclists passed by, seemingly oblivious to the abundant wildlife literally in their backyard.

A local antigrowth activist advised Nunn to talk with **Adam Brous**, publisher of *The Lowry Aviator*, the glossy, monthly magazine for residents and businesses on the redeveloped military base. Nunn, whose photo essay of nesting Cooper's Hawks and other birds had been published in the newsletter of her own Windsor Gardens neighborhood nearby, quickly made contact. "I told him about my desire to raise awareness about Westerly," she said, "because they just don't know what a gem it is – no one has told Westerly's story." Brous was receptive and invited Nunn to write something about the wetland for the magazine – but only one page, and with a tight word limit.

Within days, she submitted her draft of "Westerly Creek Birdwatchers: Are those Pelicans?" She spent her ration of words wisely, packing the story with information, tidbits and elementary field marks for the wetlands' most recognizable species. She rounded up pictures from DFO photographers of pelicans, ducks, a Snowy Egret and other birds and got the Conservation Committee to visit and pose atop the dam overlooking the wetlands. The "kicker" at the end of the story invited local residents to help protect and preserve Westerly.

Her story went out in *The Aviator's* September issue and was an immediate hit. (Read it at https://dfobirds.org/Documents/CNunn_Westerly_2020.pdf.) Readers wanted to know more about the birds, and also about DFO. The team at *The Aviator* invited her to become a continuing contributor. Nunn's new connection with community media at Lowry has become a bridge across which Lowry and her Windsor Gardens neighborhood can exchange new understanding and appreciation.

Colleen plans to host a DFO pop-up bird observatory along the trail atop the dam next spring (pandemic status permitting) to continue building awareness, appreciation and protection of Westerly's birds and other wildlife – and maybe even to bring a few new birders into the DFO fold.

.....

*EDITOR'S NOTE: We know there are more stories, perhaps untold, about "The Power of One" among DFO members – local efforts in your own neighborhood (however you define it) for the benefit of birds and habitat, birders and non-birders. What are yours? If you know of a story or have flexed the "P of O" yourself, send a confidential email to **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com.*



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i>)	\$ 60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$ 10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$ _____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	\$ _____

Total \$ _____

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

DFO NEWS

In-person field trips still on pandemic hold . . . Who's up for Zoom-related outings for now?

FROM THE PRESIDENT

With a change in time, good times again in DFO

CONSERVATION

Are informal, low-cost birding days numbered at Chico Basin Ranch?

BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

A bonus in *The Lark Bunting*: "Close to Home" visits Barr Lake via YouTube!

PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Reddish Egret

📷 Rob Raker

📍 Jackson Reservoir,
Morgan County





FROM THE PRESIDENT

With a change in time, good times again in DFO

Dave Hill

Birdie birdie, everyone!

The coronavirus pandemic began to cast its isolating shadow on 2020 just about when Mountain Daylight Time arrived last March. But I'm happy to tell you, about a week since the return of Mountain Standard Time, that we're beginning to bring DFO members back together in new and encouraging ways.

First off, our club will soon beta-test a Covid-19-safe field trip format that we're calling "Covid Zoom Trips." Assuming our Nov. 14 test run with field trip leaders as participants goes well, we'll begin scheduling "CZTs" after the first of the year. *(See field trip update story on page 5 of this issue.)*

These trips will allow participants to bird safely on individual outings "together" in time on the same day, then convene online afterwards for the sort of sharing we've missed since DFO had to suspend in-person field trips last March. They will send species lists and photos to the trip's "virtual leader" (for the test, that leader will be me!) and then meet up on Zoom to see how everyone did and share their trip experiences with each other. I embrace this opportunity for social interaction and reconnection with each other safely as we ride out the pandemic into 2021.

We had another great group experience in October when birding friend and former DFO member **Chris Rurik** gave a standout presentation via Zoom for DFO's monthly evening program. I think we're getting the hang of this web-based programming: 120 of you joined in to hear Chris talk about birding locally in the "5MR," short for "Five-Mile Radius." It's a circle five miles around, drawn on the map with your home squarely in the bull's

eye . . . or is it bird's eye? *(See written review of Rurik's program and website link to full Zoom video on page 6 of this issue.)*

Besides examples of his own 5MR adventures since leaving Denver, Chris gave illustrated shout-outs to several DFO members in their own close-to-home Denver birding haunts, including **Jason Bidgood, John Breitsch, Patrick O'Driscoll, Karen Drozda, Jared Del Rosso** and **Rebecca Laroche**. Judging from my email, members loved it. "The 5-mile Radius idea comes at a perfect time as we are all staying close to home," wrote **Doris Cruze**. **Celia Greenman** added: "Thanks for an inspiring talk last night. I have already checked out my 5-mile radius."

Speaking of new ways to enjoy membership together in DFO, I want to call your attention to the "Birding Close to Home" feature in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. It marks a multimedia milestone for our newsletter: A video "essay" by the talented YouTube "Let's Go Birding" team of DFO member **Megan Miller**, her partner **Jordan Spalding** and their videographer **Satoshi Machihara**. Look at the screen grabs and read Megan's introduction to Barr Lake, then watch them on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/gD2TvYf7SoM>) with veteran DFO member **Ira Sanders** as their guide!

Welcome to new DFO members:

Linda Lee of Louisville and Sherry Nickolaus of Brighton

Thanks for contributing to Friends of DFO and the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund:

Jim Esten, Linda Lee, Patrick O'Driscoll, and Denise
and Danny Smith

Coloring the Conservation Conversation

Dr. J. Drew Lanham
Monday, November 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom



Bill Turner

DFO's November evening program features **Drew Lanham**, a wildlife ecologist at Clemson University in South Carolina. "Coloring the Conservation Conversation" is presented with the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History as our promotional partner. Lanham, author of *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*, will discuss what it means to embrace the full breadth of his African American heritage and his deep kinship to nature and passion for birds.

In a presentation both timely and provocative, Lanham will also address barriers to birding and other outdoor activities for people of color. In 2013, he wrote "9 Rules for the Black Birdwatcher." Mixing wry humor and real caution, the rules include, among others, "Never wear a hoodie. Ever." He has also said, "When I meet another Black birder, it's like encountering an endangered species, an Ivory-billed Woodpecker – extinction looms."

Lanham blends his roles as an ornithologist, college professor, poet, author and conservation activist to bring forward in new ways our awareness of the natural world and our moral responsibility for it. Candid by nature – and because of it – he will examine how conservation must be a rigorous science and evocative art, inviting diversity and race to play active roles in celebrating the natural world.

In 2019, Lanham received the National Audubon Society's Dan Lufkin Prize for Environmental Leadership, which recognizes those who have dedicated their lives to the environment and on-the-ground conservation. A highly sought-after speaker, he delivered a keynote address at the 2020 North American Association for Environmental Education conference. A member of National Audubon's board of directors, he also serves or has served on the boards of the American Birding Association, Aldo Leopold Foundation, South Carolina Wildlife Foundation and Audubon South Carolina. He is also on the advisory board of the North American Association of Environmental Education.

Continued on page 4

COMING UP . . .



Partners in Flight

Arvind Panjabi
Wednesday, Dec 16
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

DFO does not host a December evening program. This is a special joint presentation by Denver Audubon with the support of the DFO Conservation Committee and DFO co-sponsorship. It is part of Denver Audubon's Conservation Lecture Series.

This presentation will focus on a core database used for land bird conservation planning in the U.S. and Canada.

Arvind Panjabi, a Fort Collins-based avian conservation scientist for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies since 2000, works closely with [Partners in Flight](#), a network of more than 150 organizations across the Western Hemisphere in landbird conservation science, research, planning, and policy development. He manages its species assessment database, and he was instrumental in applying the network's assessment process to Mexico's avifauna in conjunction with government and non-government partners there.

Panjabi will discuss the Avian Conservation Assessment Database, which covers biological vulnerability and area importance for more than 1,600 North American bird species. It also serves as the source for various conservation priority lists, including the Partners in Flight Watch list and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Birds of Conservation Concern. It also informed last year's report in the journal *Science* on the loss of 3 billion birds across North America since 1970.

Look for more details about this special program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Drew Lanham grew up in Edgefield, SC, where as a child he envied birds' ability to fly. He made cardboard wings and tried to float away on an umbrella, breaking his collarbone in the attempt. Once he lay down in a field and played dead to get a close-up view of Turkey Vultures. He fashioned binoculars out of two toilet-paper tubes.

He went on to attend Clemson University on a scholarship to study engineering. Although he did well, he found the field wasn't for him. Switching majors, he followed his passion for birds and wildlife and earned his doctorate in forest resources.

You must pre-register for Lanham's presentation. We anticipate a large audience beyond our DFO membership, given the subject and Lanham's appealing way of addressing it. Please sign up early online at https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/WN_l_luf3uS9qdbxQ64XAJww.

You will receive a confirmation with the link to the webinar and a reminder the day before the event. If you have never used Zoom, set yourself up with a free Zoom account now so it will be easy to log in to this and future web programs. Visit Zoom at <https://zoom.us> to find out more.

To order a copy of *The Home Place* or pre-order Lanham's new book, *Sparrow Envy: Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts* from this event's designated bookseller, visit the BookBar in Denver (<https://www.bookbardenver.com/search/author/%22Lanham%2C%20.%20Drew%22%0D>)

Got the picture? Let's put it in *The Lark Bunting*

Ever since redesigning DFO's newsletter last year, we've been looking for excellent Colorado bird photos to anchor *The Lark Bunting*'s front page.

Do YOU have what it takes to take a cover photo for *The Lark Bunting*?

We are looking for great photos – in color, nicely lit, sharply focused – of the birds we see in our state in the course of the year. Whatever the bird(s) or the situation, we'd love to see your shots – and perhaps feature them on the cover . . . or inside with an article that features your subject bird . . . or maybe just as a stand-alone photo.

The requirements are straightforward and simple:

- Photographers must be members of Denver Field Ornithologists (if you are not but want to submit, go to the DFO website's [membership page](#) first to join the club!)
- Photographers are asked to submit original, unedited photo files – not yet sized or cropped. If you're not sure, contact **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting* at jcesten@gmail.com

Send your photos or your questions to photo editor Jim at the same address. Thanks!

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for a joint July-August issue. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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In-person field trips still on pandemic hold . . . Who's up for Zoom-related outings for now?

Patrick O'Driscoll

More than seven months into the coronavirus pandemic, Denver Field Ornithologists' suspension of in-person field trips and group events will continue indefinitely.

After consulting with trip leaders Oct. 3 in a Zoom version of the annual forum for field trip leaders, the DFO Field Trip Committee voted unanimously Oct. 14 to continue indefinitely the suspension of group outings that began last March and was periodically renewed since then. It recommended resumption only once pandemic restrictions end as determined by Colorado State and local authorities. On Oct. 29, the DFO Board unanimously agreed.

Interest in our club's most popular pursuit is not dead in the water, however. In a pivot toward pandemic-safe practices on birding outings, the trip committee will soon test a new kind of field trip for the Covid-19 era. How about individual outings taken at the same time "together," then shared and compared later in online get-togethers via the Zoom teleconferencing app?

Borrowing on an approach used by Denver's Tuesday Birders group, DFO is developing the "Covid Zoom Trip." Participants will bird separately on the same day and convene online later to compare notes and discuss the birds they found.

DFO President **Dave Hill** will lead a test trip on Nov. 14 with field trip leaders as the participants. They will sign up online just like for a regular field trip. After their solo outings, they'll send Dave their lists of what they saw, and he'll compile them (plus anyone's photos) for a group meet-up via Zoom two nights later to share and compare.

"The idea is to go birding 'together' in time and in spirit, and then share the experience with each other as if we'd been side by side in the field," DFO Field Trip Director **Karen von Saltza** said in an Oct. 30 email to field trip leaders. If testing goes well, trips would start the first week of 2021.

"We all know how essential and worthwhile shared group activities have been in the life of our club," von Saltza added. "Let's work together on new ways to bird safely and celebrate the DFO community as we look forward to in-person outings again when it's safe to hold them."

Trip-leader feedback was essential to the decision not to return to in-person group outings just yet. In advance of the Oct. 3 trip

leader forum, the committee surveyed them online, and 32 out of about 45 active leaders responded. Most said they have been birding regularly on their own since the pandemic cut off field trips in mid-March, and some did so on occasion with one or two trusted friends in Covid-safe fashion. About 80 percent said they felt somewhat to very safe in the field, though about one-third confessed to not always being masked when around others. Most said they maintained recommended safe distancing most of the time.

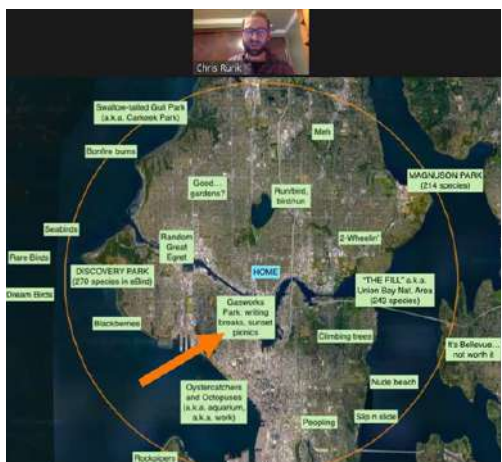
But when asked how soon they'd be comfortable leading DFO trips again, their numbers diverged. Twenty-five percent said they'd be up for trips now under Covid-safe protocols. But 35 percent said they would not lead a trip until a safe and effective coronavirus vaccine is available. More sobering was that 39 percent said they might not lead field trips again at all.

Despite the hold on in-person trips, the trip committee is preparing for the return of group outings, presumably sometime in 2021. Its work includes revising DFO's standard liability waiver – the one signed by every participant and kept on file in the online field trip registration system – to include Covid-19 release wording.

The committee has also drafted six new trip guidelines that incorporate key outdoor-recreation precautions against Covid-19 recommended by Colorado health authorities. The state guidelines include collecting contact information, keeping 6 feet of physical distance, limiting guided outings to 10 people, using face coverings, and promoting use of sanitizers and disinfecting of equipment shared by participants.

DFO already collects contact information automatically online. Other elements of DFO's proposed rules mirror or improve on the state's. They include:

- Limit of six trip participants max (leader may set size to fewer than six)
- Mandatory face coverings
- Six feet of physical distance from each other
- No sharing of scopes, binoculars or other equipment
- No carpooling during trips except among members of same family/household
- Revised DFO liability waiver incorporating Covid-19 release language



Top to bottom:
 Rurik at 38 below (Mimi Chau)
 Rurik's Seattle 5MR
 Chris on Zoom
 Chris birding at Denver City Park at sunset (Mimi Chau)

PROGRAM REVIEW

2-Wheelin' in the 5MR: An ex-DFO friend's "ode to the joy of birding near home"

Patrick O'Driscoll

Since leaving Denver 3-1/2 years ago, former DFO field trip leader and board member **Chris Rurik** has birded at 38 below zero in Alaska, logged 106 species on a "big day" adventure across Seattle, and biked and hiked more than 36 miles on a "hot, miserable" day to find 84 bird species within a 5-mile circle around his apartment.

But he still remembers with deep fondness his many DFO trips and solo outings "careening around Denver County," especially working the unlikely, overlooked and "under-birded places" that sometimes yield magical finds.

Via the magic of a Zoom webinar, Chris joined 120 of us online the evening of Oct. 26 to extol the joys of people-powered birding close to home. Beaming in from far away — his great-grandparents' farm in Washington's Puget Sound 1,300 miles from Denver — Rurik introduced his audience to 5MR birding, short for "Five-Mile Radius." This concept of drawing a map circle around one's home for exploration and discovery nearby has captured a home-sweet-home corner of the birding world over the past year. Early on, he set the tone of his presentation as "an ode to the joy of birding near home."

To view the complete video of Chris Rurik's program, visit DFO's [Programs and Events](#) archive.

"It's pretty simple," he began. "What (5MR) is, is keeping track of the birds . . . that you see within 5 miles . . . of your home. That's pretty much it." 5MR was conceived by Pacific Northwest birding blogger **Jen Sanford** (iusedtohavebirds.com), "who just started doing it on her own and writing about it a bit," Rurik said. One woman's approach to birding intensively close by gained gradual steam, then caught viral fire last year. After Sanford challenged readers to compile as many species as they could in 2019 inside their 5MR circles — kind of a stay-home Big Year — hundreds joined in. Now 5MR thrives on a Facebook page, in countless personal birding patches assembled on eBird, and across the globe as birders bulls-eye themselves in circles from the U.S. and Canada to Great Britain, Australia and Bangladesh.

Continued on page 7

The concept has morphed with people's own twists and takes, but Rurik said a couple of Sanford's first rudimentary tips for 5MR endure. One is to find "a tried and true birding patch that you (can) return to again and again." Another is "uncovering the potential of places where you might not expect to find birds . . . She (is) really big on visiting random places others are not birding."

Rurik, a writer and naturalist, paused at this point to ask rhetorically "the most important question of all: Why? Why do this? Why bird locally . . . when I could be building up a huge list and having amazing encounters with really special birds at the famous hotspots?" Of several possible answers, he focused on this one: It makes eBird better.

He went on to quote Sanford: "Exploring your radius will lead to finding new places to bird, including places no one else birds. Your sightings . . . can be far more valuable than (eBird) checklists at a heavily birded hotspot. With more bird sightings from a wider range of locations data is distributed more evenly, painting a more realistic picture of bird frequency."

"Of course, noble scientific pursuit is not always the driving force for birding close to home," Chris added. As a committed 5MR'er, he said choosing "exploration and discovery vs. chasing rarities" still leaves "plenty of room for adventure within your radius." He stressed that 5MR "isn't just patch birding. Exploration and discovery is really key to the whole thing."

He illustrated that with stories and photos of his own revelations on foot, on bike and even by ferryboat around his native Pacific Northwest and Alaska. He shared funny and touching anecdotes (and surprising bird finds) with soft-spoken wit and an occasional poetic flourish. "Birding with me on bike is kind of like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride," he quipped, recalling the reeling, herky-jerky Disneyland thrill ride. At another point, he mused, "For me, birding close to home became part of the flux of life." Later, he even invited his DFO audience to come visit "post-pandemic" for some Pacific Northwest birding together.

About halfway through the hour-long presentation, Chris "shifted gears" (*his cycling pun*) to wax nostalgic about his favorite former Denver haunts — streets, creeks, parks, and seldom-birded locations like [Heron Pond Natural Area](#), a gritty-but-birdy oasis in Denver's industrial recycling zone. He recalled

his first visit on "a very cold morning" for an Audubon birding-and-biking field trip along the South Platte River — except no one else, including the leader, showed up. "Well, that started my birding-by-bike career in Denver," he added. "Fortunately, I didn't let it stop me." A tentative stroll around the shallow pond yielded "my lifer Hermit Thrush" in the bare, trash-strewn trees. By the next fall, he was leading a DFO field trip there.

Revisiting Denver in memories and pictures, Chris deftly turned the narrative away from himself to spotlight, a few minutes at a time, the hyper-local birding pursuits of six good Denver friends and DFO members, including:

- **Jared Del Rosso**, whose 2015 about-face from chasing rarities to focusing on in-town birds "hidden in plain sight" led him to thrashers, sapsuckers, a recurring Common Poorwill in Denver Botanic Gardens and a lingering flock of 16 Red Crossbills in Cheesman Park next door. To Del Rosso, it was "all the more rewarding" because these birds were "so close to home, often in places where no other birder is looking"
- **John Breitsch**, patient as a private eye, season after season, closely observing the continuity of birds around the once-inaccessible First Creek corridor, now a hotspotted path through booming build-out neighborhoods in Green Valley Ranch near Denver's airport. "Getting access was really nice," he told Rurik. "It turned out there were all sorts of unexpected species around"
- **Karen Drozda**, intimately familiar with a whole neighborhood of birds, wildlife and trees in southeast Denver's historic Fairmount Cemetery (Colorado's largest arboretum), all lying just beyond her doorstep for the past 27 years .
- **Jason Bidgood**, eyes sharp and binoculars at hand on more than 700 daily dog walks along Westerly and Sand creeks, his productive patch in Denver's redeveloped Stapleton airport area (now called the Central Park neighborhood). "There comes a point where you are never not birding when you're outside," he told Chris
- **Rebecca Laroche**, who told him she learned how to bird by walking regularly around Cheesman Park and the gardens, where on "every walk . . . a new wonder emerged" as ordinary and extraordinary birds revealed themselves

Continued on page 8

- **Patrick O'Driscoll**, bitten hard by the birding bug just seven years ago in Denver City Park, an improbably birdy urban island just 5 minutes from downtown (and also one of Chris's favorite spots in his Denver years)

In closing, he reflected on birding around the four-generation family farm where he moved with wife **Mimi Chau** and their infant son **George** for maternity leave last year –and ended up staying: “Most of my birding right now is walking the fields and trails here. The birds are all around. I’m buoyed up by them and constantly surprised by them. . . . I feel the landscape moving and breathing around me . . .

a feeling of discovery in hidden corners waiting to be found and relationships waiting to be built . . .

The joy of birding interpenetrates all aspects of my day.”

During a short Q-&A period, Rurik was asked how to start birding by bike. “Just get out there and do it,” he replied. “Don’t be fancy about it. All you need is binoculars and a bike There’s not really a huge barrier to entry as long as you know how to ride a bike.” He did say he got a harness for his binoculars so they “are not constantly banging my knees.” Otherwise, his recommendation is to “start small and just take a spin around your neighborhood and see what birds you see . . . (and) start to experience what it’s like to hear the bird sounds around you.”

To map your own Five-Mile Radius, Chris Rurik suggests these two websites:

“Basic” version: <https://www.mapdevelopers.com/draw-circle-tool.php>

“Fancy” version: <https://github.com/joshuahchapman/5mr-tools>

Shopping online? Support DFO with Amazon Smile

If you shop on Amazon.com, you are now able to help donate one-half of a percent (0.5%) of your purchases to Denver Field Ornithologists under the online marketplace’s charitable giving program, [Amazon Smile](#).

Best of all, this costs you nothing. When you sign up once in Amazon Smile and designate “*Denver Field Ornithologists Inc*” as your preferred charity, Amazon will donate that percentage of the price of your purchases to DFO. The only requirement: When you’re ready to check out, you must go to the Amazon Smile page to complete your transaction.

This means you can shop at [amazon.com](#), Amazon Prime, the Amazon Smile page or any other way you normally interact with Amazon, adding items to your shopping cart as you go. The key is that sometime BEFORE you click on “**Proceed to Checkout**,” you need to be on the Amazon Smile page.

Before you shop, you’ll need to sign up first (just once) in Amazon Smile to designate your charity. Start that one-time

process at [smile.amazon.com](#). Fill in the sign-up information, and when asked to pick your charity, type “**Denver Field Ornithologists Inc**” in the charity-name field and click “Select.”

In the future, every time you order, as long as you are in [smile.amazon.com](#) before checking out, your purchase confirmation message will display this note:

“You made a difference. Amazon will make a donation to Denver Field Ornithologists.”

Yes, one-half of 1 percent is literally half a penny on the dollar. But over time and with more participants, those “ha’pennies” can add up.

Don’t forget: you must be on the Amazon Smile page when you complete your purchase or there will be no donation. You cannot restore a missing donation if you forget to make your purchase that way.

Membership renewal time? You know the drill

Mary Cay Burger

If you're hearing from the DFO Membership chair, you can guess what time of year it is, can't you? This is my annual appeal, and if you've heard it before, you know what I'm about to say next.

Yearly memberships in Denver Field Ornithologists expire on **Dec. 31, 2020**. As I remind you each year, please put renewing your membership on your to-do list. In fact, why not do it right now? It's about as easy as focusing your binoculars.

To renew, you can renew online with credit card or eCheck through DFO's PayPal account (and you don't need your own PayPal account to pay on ours, either). Go to the [DFO website](#), scroll down the home page and click on the "JOIN OR RENEW TODAY" link on the left. If you cannot pay that way, copy and print the membership form on the back page of this newsletter and send in your check via snail mail.

A DFO membership purchased or renewed today will extend for the remaining months of 2020 and all of 2021. For your convenience, you can also pay for up to three years of membership at a time. If you're not sure when your membership expires, check your personal profile on the DFO website, Log in and click MENU in the upper right corner. Then click "MEMBERS ONLY" and "MY ACCOUNT."

As you know, DFO membership fees are modest: "\$25 a year (or \$10 a year for students under age 26), which includes an electronic copy delivery of *The Lark Bunting*.

Your membership payment helps our birding club carry out its mission to promote the study and preservation of birds and their habitats. Your dues make it possible for DFO to have a website, publish a newsletter, and bring you excellent speakers for our monthly evening programs.

As we enter the traditional season of gift giving, consider giving someone a thoughtful and lasting present — a gift membership in DFO. It's a great way to connect to the birding community along Colorado's Front Range — and for those new to birding, what better way to get started? The online membership renewal page includes information about gift memberships.

Thanks to all of you for your past support, and thank you in advance for renewing your DFO membership. Do it today!

Consider a year-end gift for DFO, bird science

Patrick O'Driscoll

When you renew your DFO membership, you have an easy opportunity to do something extra for birds and their habitat — and for our club as well. It's literally at your fingertips.

Beneath membership choices in the online renewal form are two gray, fill-in boxes. Those spaces are where you can help make a difference with year-end, tax-deductible contributions to DFO's two special giving funds.

Research, Education, and Conservation Fund

The [DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund](#)'s grants support scientists and educators whose work contributes to our understanding of birds and bird conservation. This helps fulfill an important part of DFO's mission: Preservation of birds and their habitat in Colorado. Member generosity and the volunteer work of the DFO Grants Committee funded four grants in 2020 totaling \$7,350, the largest annual award since the fund was established in 1994. (Read about the work the 2020 grants are supporting in the October issue of *The Lark Bunting*.)

Friends of DFO Fund

Established this year by the DFO Board, this fund gives donors a choice in directing contributions not only to research and education, but also to general expenses and special needs for club operations. This can include monthly program meetings (room rentals, speaker honoraria, DFO's Zoom account), communications (newsletter layout and Mail Chimp and Survey Monkey accounts), and costs of running the organization such as insurance. Such donations help us upgrade monthly programs with "name" presenters such as birding expert and wildlife guide author **Kenn Kaufman** (September) and the upcoming November program with birder and wildlife ecologist **J. Drew Lanham** (*The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*).

To donate, write the amount you wish to contribute in the designated field online when you renew your membership. Check if your employer matches your charitable contributions, too. DFO is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, so donors can deduct the amount from their federal income taxes.

Thanks in advance for considering a financial gift for DFO and the mission it pursues.



BIRDING CLOSE TO HOME:

A bonus in *The Lark Bunting*: “Close to Home” visits Barr Lake via YouTube!

EDITOR’S NOTE: This month, *The Lark Bunting* has partnered to present a video version of “Birding Close to Home.” THANK YOU to DFO member **Megan Miller** and her “Let’s Go Birding” YouTube channel team (including her partner **Jordan Spalding** and videographer **Satoshi Machihara**) for their tour of Barr Lake with local expert and DFO member **Ira Sanders**. Enjoy Megan’s brief essay and “screen grabs” from the video here, and THEN view their amazing “Let’s Go Birding” trip on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD2TvYf7SoM&feature=youtu.be>).

Megan Miller

The first time I visited Barr Lake, I was maybe 8 or 9 years old (somewhere between 1996 and 2000). I remember being enthralled by the boardwalks, the vastness of the lake, and the height of the trees. It felt like a dense wilderness full of wild things and new discoveries. Stories of giant owls and enormous eagles floated through my mind as we walked along wooden-planked paths strangled by smartweed and lapped at by gentle greenish waves. This introduction to Barr Lake stuck with me. I began volunteering at Denver Audubon’s banding station. Barr Lake became a living, growing, fundamental element of my birding upbringing.

Barr Lake (the vast and historic core of [Barr Lake State Park](#) in Adams County northeast of Denver) is wildly dynamic. Each year brings a new and unique combination of conditions to its shores and its hundreds and thousands of birds. I remember fondly the year when thousands of Sandhill Cranes used it as a staging area during migration. Every morning we’d open the banding-station nets to the departure music of Sandhill Cranes as they spread across the agricultural lands that surround the park.

Continued on page 11



Barr Lake also offers unique opportunities for learning to identify a large variety of difficult bird families. Warblers, sparrows, shorebirds, and winter ducks are abundant in their respective seasons. It was at Barr Lake that I fell in love with sparrows and their many subtleties, and learned to differentiate many a juvenile *Spizella*. As a hotspot for migration, Barr Lake also brings in a good number of rarities every year. I've seen Royal Tern, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Dunlin, and White-throated Sparrow, all from the banding-station deck a short walk from the park visitor center.

I have also participated in many Christmas Bird Counts at the park. Some of my most vivid birding memories there include standing in the freezing cold waiting for **Francis Commerçon** to count every single Common Merganser, one by one. Another year, I convinced my father (who is not a birder) to join me on the holiday season count. We arrived that morning to blizzard-like conditions and frigid temperatures. I commend his commitment – and we did manage to see a few species that day, including my very first Harris's Sparrow.

Barr Lake is the place where I've met and grown with some of the most important people in my life. It has been my own refuge in difficult times, too, a place where I could grow without the fear or instability that can take over in other parts of our lives. I have kayaked its waters and hiked its sandy (and muddy) shoreline. I have carried my scope countless times and countless miles back and forth to its gazebo viewpoint. And I've spent the past 10 years walking the banding station's meandering maze of paths.

I am connected to Barr Lake in so many ways. I invite you to connect with it, too.

.....

Have you adopted a birding spot that has become your own "home patch" or a place you find yourself going back to again and again? Each month, *The Lark Bunting* features DFO member essays about the destinations they love. If you would like to share your thoughts about YOURS, email TLB editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or call him at 303-885-6955. Thanks!



Top to bottom:
Ira Sanders and Jordan Spalding (Satoshi Machihara)
Barr Lake sign (Satoshi Machihara)
Megan Miller
Megan scoping Barr Lake
White-breasted nuthatch popup (Satoshi Machihara)

CONSERVATION

Are informal, low-cost birding days numbered at Chico Basin Ranch?

Roger Koester and Patrick O'Driscoll

In a potentially dire development for Colorado birding and bird science, the staff of the Colorado State Land Board is pressing for radical change at Chico Basin Ranch that could eliminate self-guided daytrip visits by birders after the current ranching lease expires in 2024.

Under unofficial proposals outlined orally at the board's Oct. 14 meeting, the ranch's honor system of modest daily fees for informal public recreation such as birding, hiking and wildlife photography would be scrapped. In its place, a "hospitality/guest ranch services" leaseholder would conduct structured – and more expensive – daytime and overnight operations at the state-owned property in El Paso and Pueblo counties.

Such a dude-ranch model for all recreation on this working cattle ranch would aim to generate as much money as possible from leasing. After all, proceeds of leases and sales on 4 million acres of state trust lands overseen by the Colorado State Land Board do go to support public schools in the state. And drastically lower income this year from gas-and-oil production on state lands has the board hunting for more revenue.

But the possible end of Chico Basin's system of casual, low-cost (\$10-\$15 per person) daytrips by hundreds of annual visitors to a premier Colorado birding hotspot wouldn't just shut out birders. It could prove costly for science.

For years now, DFO field trippers and others who have birded at the ranch southeast of Colorado Springs have recorded their sightings on eBird, the international scientific database kept by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Many if not most of the ranch's 344 recorded bird species – more than perhaps any other place in Colorado – were first recorded by birders on informal excursions. The number of birder visits, and the [eBird](#) citizen science that goes with them, would undoubtedly drop under a costlier and more restrictive management framework.

Nevertheless, "Birding, mountain biking, hiking, etc. will not be available just by paying a small fee and driving through the gate," **Greg Ochis**,

Continued on page 13

ACTION ALERT

Write the State Land Board NOW

As the Colorado State Land Board weighs the fate of Chico Basin Ranch as both a birding destination and a destination for birds, a critical step in planning for a new ranch lease is already near.

On **Thursday, Nov. 12**, the land board is scheduled to vote on "approved" uses at the ranch such as cattle ranching and irrigated growing of feed crops. This vote also would include whether birding and other non-agricultural activities will remain among previously approved uses.

Aiken Audubon of Colorado Springs, National Audubon's nearest chapter to the ranch, asks all concerned birders and others to urge the land board immediately in writing to keep birding, bird banding and K-12 education as continuing and approved uses. The deadline to comment is **Wednesday, Nov. 11 at noon**. The [contact page](#) and [fill-in form for public comment](#) are available [on the Land Board's website](#).

"Birders are very light on the land, and are able to contribute valuable biological information to that which the banders provide," said **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair for Aiken. With every written comment, "I would also include a plea for keeping the ranch intact," she added.

That's because the land board also is weighing whether to subdivide the current 87,000-acre spread into up to three different units for lease. If split, that could require more ranch infrastructure and fencing, degrading the habitat for birds and other migratory wildlife.

Finally, Hodges asked writers to express appreciation for the access birders have enjoyed at Chico over the years. She also asked that they urge the board NOT to set birding apart from the ranching operation under separate "layered leasing." To do so would likely make it financially impossible for any nonprofit organization to manage birding access for the benefit of birds and birders.



CHICO BASIN *cont from page 12*

assistant director of the land board staff, said during the Oct. 14 work session. "We see it under the auspices of the hospitality/guest ranch service, on a daytrip or overnight basis." He was speaking of ranch management under a so-called "layered lease," with cattle and irrigated-crop operations leased separately from non-agricultural activities like birding, hunting, fishing and more.

Box T Partners, also known as [Ranchlands](#), has managed all aspects of Chico Basin since 1999 and is lauded for its environmentally responsible operation. *(To learn more, read "Chico Basin: Colorado's prairie gem for birds is a model of ranching stewardship," in the [October 2020 issue of The Lark Bunting](#).)* Ranchlands already runs a modest working-guest-ranch program as well as hunting and fishing across the 87,000-acre spread. It also hosts a bird-banding station popular with school and group field-trip programs.



What has set it apart for birders, however, is the no-fuss, hands-off way Ranchlands accommodates individual and small-group daytrips. Visitors drive through the ranch gateway and stop at a rustic kiosk in the ranch headquarters yard. They sign in with pencil and paper (no reservation required), fold their cash fee into an envelope, and head off on their own to bird one of the largest remaining expanses of native shortgrass prairie and sandsage in the U.S. *(Note: This easy access is temporarily on hold because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it is expected to resume once the need for restrictions passes.)*



For years, many birders have enjoyed memorable Denver Field Ornithologists outings to Chico Basin Ranch, easily the most popular destination for club field trips. The online sign-up sheet quickly fills to capacity whenever a new Chico Basin trip is posted.

The by land board staff talk about ending self-guided, drive-in visits surprised the DFO Conservation Committee. It has been monitoring land board discussions about Chico Basin ever since word of possibly selling or breaking up

Continued on page 14



CHICO BASIN *cont from page 13*

the 136-square-mile ranch raised warning flags earlier this year. In August, Front Range bird-related organizations including DFO, led by Aiken Audubon of Colorado Springs, signed a joint letter and sent separate entreaties to the state not to split up or sell off the ranch. To do so, they said, could jeopardize Chico Basin's status as an important year-round and migratory refuge for birds and platform for citizen science and wildlife research.

Subsequently, the land board decided it would "hold the entirety of Chico Basin Ranch through at least 2034" – in other words, not sell the property anytime soon. But the board and its staff had not discussed publicly until now whether birding and other public activities would continue as they do under the current lease, or if the ranch would remain intact.

None of the ideas for the next lease at Chico Basin were committed to writing as of the Oct. 14 land board session. Over the next couple of months, the board staff will develop proposed language for a formal "Request for Proposals" (RFP). That document that would advertise the board's intent to solicit bids for a new lease or leases at Chico Basin Ranch to take effect once the present lease expires in 2024. The staff intends to present an RFP to the board for discussion and approval at its January 2021 meeting.

"DFO continues to advocate for and monitor this closely because Chico Basin Ranch matters," said **Susan Blansett**, club vice president and interim chair of the DFO Conservation Committee. "If everyday birders were to lose the simple, year-round access we've had up to now, it would likely erode citizen science efforts that reveal to us, year after year, what a treasure the ranch is for Colorado and the birds."

Based on lengthy discussions at the land board's previous meeting in September, specific approved activities on the ranch would include cattle-raising and irrigated cropland as "primary," with hunting and fishing, hospitality/guest ranch, K-12 programs, career development, birding, and commercial photography as secondary, "encouraged" or "optional."

Although birding has been a specifically approved use on the ranch in the board's published record, Ochis presented charts to the board that show potential revenue generation from the various lease components – except in the column under "Birding," where there was only "TBD" – "to be determined."

Duke Phillips III, head of Ranchlands/Box T Partners, has said emphatically that Box T has been able to adopt new programs with little or no cost to the land board. He has also said briefly or in passing that his ranch managers are able to accommodate birders and wildlife observers without any cost or disruption to ranch operations.

Linda Hodges, Aiken Audubon's conservation chair, spoke in late October with Ochis about multiple leases. "The layered lease is all conjecture at this point," Hodges told the DFO Conservation Committee, "but our time on the ranch would likely be very limited, and expensive." At the same time, she said Ochis told her the land board would be "flexible about it and would work with us to make it feasible." What that means is unclear.

Photos:
Chico Basin sign
DFO birders at Chico Basin (Patrick O'Driscoll)
Turkey Vultures (Anna Elledge/Ranchlands)
Skull (Patrick O'Driscoll)
DFO birders at Chico Basin (Mark Amershek)

ESSAY

Fall, and the song of cranes, stir a grateful heart



Susan Blansett

What a year 2020 has been – and it's still not over. This decade-ending year has been tough on so many fronts that it's hard to keep track – and harder still to forget, as much as we wish we could.

The Covid-19 pandemic still distances us from each other – family, colleagues, birding friends. Endless political campaigns divided and exhausted us. Hard lessons about systemic racial and social inequality continue to vex us. Record-setting seasons for wildland fires and tropical storms frightened and humbled us, and those widespread bird die-offs puzzled and saddened us.

It has felt, at times, like we're hanging onto hope by our fingernails. But hanging on we still are, and with hope comes gratitude. As I took ahead soon to our traditional time of giving thanks, here are five things I'm grateful for.

- **Front-line workers of every stripe!** Brave women and men work in health care, fire safety, teaching, grocery delivery, transportation and a hundred other essential occupations. In this time of pandemic and uncertainty, they keep daily life moving forward, often at great cost to themselves.
- **High voter turnout!** Whether or not we know the final results of the 2020 election by the time you read this, America was expected to break every voting turnout record since 1908, according to **Michael McDonald**, director of the U.S. Elections Project. This signals to me that, by and large, Americans still believe in the power of the popular vote and the responsibility of every one of us to make our voices heard. So hallelujah! We still have that in common. Perhaps it's something to build on.
- **Our DFO community's response to the pandemic!** I'm grateful for and proud of the DFO Board's commitment to keeping our members safe. And I applaud every one of our

club's committees for finding fresh ways to provide member value and fulfill our mission in spite of the months-long hold on in-person gatherings. Taking the fellowship of birding "virtual" continues to be a challenge, but it has brought us new tools for appreciating and sharing with each other our passion for birds and nature – tools that will become a permanent part of our member experience.

- **My family!** I am grateful especially for my two sisters who recently visited from the Carolinas, traveling to Colorado with all the testing and precautionary measures that came with it. With our brother **Joe** and my husband **Tom**, we enjoyed our long-awaited reunion on the road through southwest Colorado at the peak of autumn color and gorgeous weather. After overnighting in Gunnison, Ouray and Durango, we intentionally arrived on our final night in Monte Vista, which leads me to . . .
- **Fall Sandhill Crane migration!** The surge of northward migration in spring may be the greatest seasonal spectacle in all of birding, but late October holds its own special character: lustrous colors, crisp air and more challenging bird identifications . . . and *no crowds* at [Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge](#)!

I am also grateful that, as fellow birders, you'll allow me to expand on that last point. In a family of nature enthusiasts, I'm the only birder – but Joe and our sister **Carol** insisted on rising with me at 5:30 a.m. on that last day to witness an unforgettable sunrise at the refuge.

The pre-dawn chorus mixed gobble and warble as hundreds of Sandhill Cranes moved invisibly from outlying fields into the refuge's expansive marsh. Slowly, their silhouettes and those of scattered blackbirds emerged as daylight seeped above the Sangre de Cristos and through the cattails.

Once the sun cleared the mountains and filtered through lofty clouds, waterfowl suddenly appeared on the open water before us: pintails and shovelers, coots and a few small grebes.

The Sandhills' rising cacophony was punctuated by the occasional, distant blasts of duck hunters' shotguns. As the sky lightened, 30 to 40 elk came into view in a neighboring field.

By then, the cranes were everywhere – flying singly and in small groups, flushing up and resettling on the marsh, performing their graceful, mesmerizing dance. If I see this spectacle a hundred times, it will thrill me as much each time as it did the first, and gratitude will fill my heart.

Photo:

Susan Blansett, sister Carol Wiggins and sunrise with cranes (Joe Blansett)



Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

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Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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